

**Velvet Paws  
and  
Shiny Eyes**

**Carol Cassidy  
Cole**



*Polly*

# VELVET PAWS AND SHINY EYES

*Adventures of a little  
Boy in Natures Wonder-  
land—among furry friends  
and feathery.*

BY  
CAROL CASSIDY COLE



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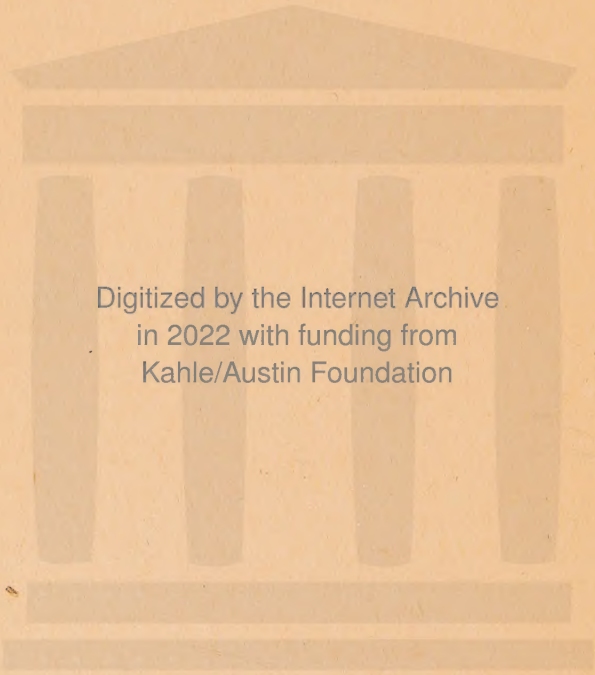


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# Velvet Paws and Shiny Eyes

## CHAPTER I

### THE NIGHT IN THE OWL'S NEST.

ONCE there was a boy, who lived with his parents on the outskirts of a little Canadian village. He was not good for much—that boy, and sometimes made his mother and father very sad. His greatest delight was to tease and torment all the animals about the place, until they were at their wits' end. Also, he loved to get his dad's gun and go into the woods and shoot at the birds, squirrels and rabbits.

One day he was out in the little wood sitting under an oak tree waiting for something to come along that he might shoot at. It was a warm April day, and the boy soon became very drowsy. His head drooped against the tree, and he was almost asleep, when he was startled by a rustling above him. Leaning forward he peered up into an owl's nest. So this is where the owl lived that he hunted so carefully for all spring! He stood on his feet, meaning to run his arm into the hollow and get the eggs which he thought must be there.

But as he looked the hole grew bigger and bigger, until it seemed as if he were looking into a dark cave. Strange thing this! He looked about him. The trees were unfamiliar and so huge. And then he looked down at his feet. He rubbed his eyes. Surely that pair of elf-like feet did not belong to him. In growing fear he looked at his hands. They were very small.

He drew off his cap—it was no larger than a small round button. And then it came to him what must have happened—he was turned into an Elf, just as he had been reading about a boy that very morning, who had been unkind to the cat!

Now the boy became very frightened, and cried, and stood on his tiptoes. But it was no use—he stayed just as little.

“Bur-r, what’s the trouble, what’s the trouble?” called a voice from the depths of the cave. The boy started and looked up. Surely he must be asleep. He pinched himself, but no, it was not a dream then. There in the dim hollow of the tree sat a brown owl, and it was from him the words were coming. Strange he had often heard that “bur-r” before, but now he understood just what the owl was saying: “Who are you, who are you?” sang the voice.

“I used to be a little boy, called Eric Oldson,” said the boy, “but now I don’t know who I am.”

“Hoot! Hoot!” laughed the owl. “Little boy, indeed, you look to me more like one of our little Elves of the forest. Come up to my nest,” invited the owl. “My name is Tawny Owl, and I live in this tree trunk.”

So Eric scrambled up, and found that he had no difficulty in sitting beside the owl in the opening of the hollow. “I’m glad you’re not really a little boy,” said the owl, “for some of them are not kind to us wood-folk. But the Elves are our good friends indeed. It will soon be dark now, and I shall have to go out to hunt food. You know, we owls sleep by day and hunt by night. You may as well spend the night in my nest, only be sure to keep on the lookout for that old egg-sucker, Willy Weasel. But, hist!” said Tawny Owl, suddenly, “Get behind me quickly.” Eric did as he





"Bur-r, what's the trouble, what's the trouble?"

was told, and the owl held himself very still, but remained in the doorway. His head sank down in his neck-feathers, and his eyes closed to a mere slit. Footsteps approached, human footsteps, and a hunter passed within two feet of the opening. But Tawny Owl was wise. He knew that if he sat very still no human eye could find him out, so nearly the color and shape of the tree cavity was he. "That was one of the hunters from Scarboro village," said the owl, "and he's out after wild geese. But you never can tell, he might have taken a shot at us just for luck. Well, I must be off," said Tawny, ruffling his wings and preparing for flight; "Now don't forget to keep a sharp lookout for that old villain, Willy Weasel!" His soft downy wings just brushed the edge of the nest, and he was gone.



"But hist!" said Tawny Owl suddenly, "get behind me!"



## CHAPTER II

### WILLY WEASEL VISITS THE OWL'S NEST.

**I**T had been a very poor day for Willy Weasel. In the first place, Reddy Squirrel, whom he had been able to rout out, had in some way escaped him. Up and down the trees he had chased him, out upon the rocks, into the brush wood and then again up a tree. Reddy had just seemed to disappear amid the branches of a huge elm tree and although Willy Weasel had waited patiently, not one sight of him could he get. Of course he did not know that Reddy Squirrel, who could venture out on the very tips of the tiniest branches, had jumped into the top of a neighboring tree, and was away hours ago, having no doubt a good laugh at the thought of Willy Weasel waiting in that old elm.

So, of course, Weasel was in a pretty bad humor when about dusk he was sneaking around Tawny Owl's nest. Now he knew that there were no eggs in the owl's nest; he had been there before, and he also knew that Tawny himself would be out, but like all robbers, that was the time he liked best to visit. What he really hoped for was that Tawny Owl had left some scraps of the fine fat mice that he saw him carrying in yesterday. Anyway, he stopped at the foot of the tree in which the owl lived.

Now, little Eric Oldson, the boy who had been turned into an Elf, and was spending the night in Tawny Owl's nest, had not passed a very restful time. He had stayed up close to the opening that he might hear

the approach of any danger. To tell the truth he was pretty well frightened at the thought of a visit from the weasel. He had never really seen a weasel himself, but he knew they were very bad, much to be dreaded creatures, and that his father had had several chickens killed by this same little pest. And also he remembered a story a neighbor had told of two weasels he had found fighting over a little chicken. Both had hold of the chicken pulling in opposite directions. So busy were they that the farmer had been able to put his hands down and grab them both by the backs of the necks. He put them into a cage and offered them food. This they would not eat, but in a few days one of them had eaten the other, leaving nothing but the skeleton. This story had so impressed the boy that he had always had a dread of the animal. So, of course, it was in great fear that he lay and waited for Willy Weasel.

It seemed to him hours he had been there, when he heard a slight rustle at the foot of the tree. He put his head out and could just make out a wedge-shaped head and long snakelike body raised against the tree trunk. The back was brown, but the under part of the body was almost a pure white. With his snaky movement he was working his way up the tree. The boy in the owl's nest shook like a leaf. What should he do? He gathered all his strength, which was not so much now that he was an Elf, and gave what seemed to him one mighty shout—at the same time he heaved out a bunch of old dry bones which he had found in the bottom of the nest, so that they all came rattling down in Willy Weasel's face.

Oh gracious! Willy Weasel gave one squeak, and for once in his life went straight down a tree instead

of circling round it. There was just one thing he feared and that was a human being, and surely that was a human voice that had shouted at him, and human teeth that had rattled down into his face. He reached the ground and ran as if the seven devils were after him.

It was a good turn indeed that Eric had done Tawny Owl that night, for Willy Weasel never again dared so much as show his wicked face in that neighborhood.





Willie Weasel gave one squeak, and for once in his life,  
went straight down a tree.

## CHAPTER III

### THE CONCERT IN THE FROG POND.

**T**AWNY OWL returned at dawn, and you may be sure that he felt pretty grateful when Eric told him of the weasel's visit and how he had frightened him away. He had a good laugh at the thought of old Willy Weasel being put to flight by such a little creature as the Elf. But just the same he realized that he owed a great deal to Eric, and he wanted to repay him. So he told Eric that he might share his nest and that he would take him with him on some of his journeys.

At one time Eric would have scorned such an humble offer, but he was very glad now to accept it, for he had wondered what was going to become of him now that he was such a tiny creature. He found that it was best for him to sleep in the day time as the owl did, so that he might protect the nest at night when Tawny was away.

Some of the nights seemed pretty long to Eric, and he used to steal out occasionally to stretch his legs, and to see if he could find some berries.

One night he wandered down to the frog pond. Night after night he had heard the chorus go up from this pool, and he was really curious to see who the singers were. The very first thing that he saw as he reached the pond was old Mr. Toad. There he sat on a lily-pad, blinking his bright eyes, and strange as it may

seem, he was singing. Now Eric had always thought that toads were just ugly old warty creatures to be poked about with a stick, so he was very much surprised to hear a really sweet song coming from Mr. Toad. Soon the singing stopped, and Eric's eyes nearly popped out of his head at what he saw. What was Mr. Toad doing? First of all he humped his back two or three times, and the skin split right down the centre. Then slowly he began working his legs up and down—up and down until off came the old skin. And what do you think he did then? Rolled it up in a little ball, thrust out his little pink tongue, and swallowed his old skin. There he stood. Still Mr. Toad, to be sure, but in a brand new coat. Now Eric was so astonished that he gave a little squeak, and plunk, off went Mr. Toad in the water.

By this time Eric was becoming quite interested in the little creatures of the pool, and he perched quietly up on a root which stuck out of the water. In his little boy days he had always thought that a frog was a frog, and that's all there was to it. But now he saw that he was mistaken. There were many, many kinds of frogs, and they all had a different call.

First of all there was Mr. Bull-frog, the grandfather of the pool, the old fellow who buries himself in the mud all winter, and comes out with the first sign of spring. Then there was Clucking Frog. Eric looked long before he could find the little creature which made the hoarse clucking note. But there he was sure enough, in his dark brown coat, and he was doing his best to keep up the chorus with Bull Frog and another tiny frog which was so small that it could barely be seen. It did not seem possible that so much sound



could come from such a tiny creature. Eric crept far out on the old tree until he was directly over him. This little frog was not more than an inch long, and of a yellowish-brown color. He seemed to be a very lively little fellow, and on his toes were little round discs. As he sang a very queer thing took place. His throat swelled up like a little bubble, and with his mouth closed tightly, there came from him that high, sweet note. What he seemed to Eric to be saying was "H-y-las." "H-y-las." And then Eric remembered a story his teacher had told them that last day in school. He had not thought much about it then, but now he remembered that it was something like this:

"Hylas, an auburn-haired boy, went to the spring to fetch water for supper for Hercules and Telamon, and was seized by the nymphs and drawn in. When he did not return, Hercules went in search of him. He tramped through the bog, club in hand, shouting 'H-yl-las' to the full depth of his throat, and he heard a thin little voice come from the water. It was Hylas answering. And Hylas in the shape of the little frog, has been calling from our pools ever since." The teacher had also told them that Hylas, or little Peeping Frog as he is sometimes called, leaves the pool after awhile, and takes to the trees and brushes, and is called tree-toad by some people. That is why they have the little discs on their feet, that they may stick to trees more easily. Eric was so busy watching Mr. Peeper that he leaned far out over the pool, when ker-splash! down he fell into the water! There was dead silence in Frog-land. Bull-frog, Clucking Frog, and Hylas—all disappeared as if by magic. And Eric scrambled from one lily-pad to another, until wet and dripping, he reached the shore.

He ran quickly to the Owl's nest, and I can tell you the bed of feathers and down, at the bottom of the nest felt good that night to a wet, cold little Elf-boy.



There he sat on a lily-pad blinking his bright eyes.

## CHAPTER IV

### ERIC MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF REDDY SQUIRREL.

**I**T is very much the same with the little creatures of the wood as it is with human beings. When anything of interest happens, the news is heralded about from one to another, until nearly every bird and beast in the forest knows about it. Now this is just what took place in the Little Wood. When old Willy Weasel was routed out of the owl's nest by Eric the Elf, it was not many hours before all the Wood Folk knew about it. Reddy Squirrel told his friend Chipmunk; Chipmunk told Marmot Woodchuck, and so it went. Mother Woodchuck, who had six baby woodchucks at home, was so delighted when she heard of Weasel's fright that she gave a leap in the air, and as woodchucks have clumsy, heavy bodies that are not meant for jumping, she went tumbling over and over down the steep bank. But it did not hurt Mrs. Marmot one bit, for she has a tough skin, and is used to burrowing around in the dirt.

Then, too, Reddy Squirrel was particularly pleased. For that very morning had not Weasel given him a mad chase up and down the trees, out on the rocks, and at last had, as Old Weasel thought, cornered him in a huge oak tree? But, Reddy Squirrel was not so easily beaten. Out on the top-most bough he had gone, and Weasel had settled himself as far out on a branch as he dared go, to wait for Reddy to come down. Already, in his mind, he was tasting the nice juicy morsel the squirrel would make. But Reddy, seeing that he

had small chance of getting out of the tree as he had gone up, knew another way.

Now all squirrels, strange as it may seem, are capable of a crude sort of flying. Of course there is the real Flying Squirrel which is formed a little differently from the ordinary one. He can leap from a tree top and sail to the ground as easily as a bird. But the ordinary squirrel, like our friend Reddy, can also fly when necessary—and this is exactly what Reddy had done. He took one look at the ugly, watering jaws of Willy Weasel, and leaped bodily into the air. His huge tail flattened out, his legs spread with the breeze, until he looked like a parachute. He kept up a tremendous motion with his feet and tail, like a swimming poodle-dog, and landed unhurt on the ground fully thirty feet below. Off he had gone like a streak to his retreat.

Old Weasel had closed his beady eyes for a moment, when he thought he had Reddy safe in the tree, and when he opened them again there wasn't a sign of the squirrel to be seen. He could hardly believe his eyes, and waited around for hours, until hungry and cross he started out for the owl's nest. Now we all know what happened there, and you may well understand the rejoicing among the wood-folk when Reddy told them of the way the little Elf had frightened Weasel away.

Now Reddy Squirrel, who is a very inquisitive little creature, and is always poking his sharp little nose into other people's affairs, wanted very much to see this little Elf, who had done them such a good turn. So he went around to get his cousin Chipmunk to go with him. But Chipmunk would not be coaxed. He liked too well to stay near his hole. If you have ever chased a chipmunk you will understand this. He is



never more than one jump from home. He is a very playful little creature too, just like a young boy, and often you may come upon two or three of them chasing each other round and round—first one leading then another. Surely they must be playing tag. This is what they were doing when Reddy found them, and as they would not stop their game, Reddy went off by himself to have a look at this wonderful Elf.

It did not take Reddy long with his swift little feet to reach the owl's nest—and he did not enter by the front door either. He jumped from the top of a neighboring tree, and came down the old oak in which the Elf lived. Very informal was this visit of Reddy's. In fact the first thing he did was to look in the window. Now, he could not have told you just what kind of a creature he had expected to find. But surely anything that could overcome that dreadful enemy, Weasel, must be a very imposing personage. So when his sharp little eyes made out the tiny form of Eric stretched on the bed of feathers, it struck him as so ridiculous that he could not restrain a snicker. Then he frisked around to the door. He peeked down from the roof and laughed till his sides ached; finally he struck an attitude in the doorway and fairly squealed in mirth and ridicule.

He became so noisy that the Elf awakened with a start, and jumped to his feet. He took off his tiny button of a cap and advanced to meet his visitor. But what had come over Reddy Squirrel? His mirth had vanished as suddenly as it came. He had needed just one good look at the Elf to recognize the features of the little boy, Eric Oldson, who had treated him so cruelly some weeks ago. Yes, there was no mistaking, it was surely the same little boy who had caught him

in a trap, and shut him up in a box. Reddy had worked all one night, frantically gnawing a corner of the box until he managed to squeeze out, and ran home nearly starved to death. Now, as Reddy thought of all this, he felt very hard toward the little Elf. He had intended making friends with him, and had even thought of bringing him some nuts as a thank you for ridding



His mirth vanished as suddenly as it came.

the woods of Willy Weasel. And then he saw how pitifully thin and tiny Eric had become, and how he trembled as he stood on his little feet. His heart softened and he thought only of the kindness Eric had rendered them, and he decided to hold no grudge against him. At Eric's invitation he came into the owl's nest. So you see the Wood-Folk often have more sense than some human beings.

## CHAPTER V.

### ERIC BECOMES ACQUAINTED WITH REDDY SQUIRREL'S FAMILY.

ERIC became so interested in his little visitor, Reddy Squirrel, and found him so entertaining, that he had almost forgotten how hungry he was. He had not had anything to eat since the berries which Tawny Owl had brought the day before, and now he began to feel the want of food. I suspect he must have looked very wistful when Reddy talked about the store of nuts which he was saving up for winter. At any rate Reddy suggested that Eric come with him to the other side of the wood and see his house and young family.

So they set out—the quick-footed little animal leading, and the little Elf-Boy following more slowly. As they passed an interesting looking hole in the ground the squirrel rushed up to it to shout a greeting to his cousin Chipmunk. But Chipmunk was very shy, and seeing Reddy's companion would not come out. So they proceeded on their journey. Soon another cavity in the side of a steep bank attracted Eric's attention, and Reddy explained to him that that was where Marmot Woodchuck, another cousin, lived. Eric began to think that Reddy must have a very large number of relatives, which is quite true, for nearly all of what is called the gnawing animals belong to his family.

There are many kinds of true squirrels, the red squirrel (our friend Reddy was one of these) being by far the most numerous. Then there are grey squir-

rels and black squirrels and last of all, flying squirrels. One species is found in North America. Ground squirrel, or Chipmunk as he is called, is a very near relative of Reddy's. He spends most of his time in the trees, but builds his nest and hides his nuts in holes which he burrows in the ground. Then there is Woodchuck, who lives entirely on the ground and does not venture in trees; in fact he is so heavy and clumsy that he could not climb a tree to save his life.

Another of Reddy Squirrel's relatives is the prairie dog. He looks very much like a squirrel, but like Woodchuck, he lives entirely on the ground. He is a great burrower, and after he has made his hole, takes great pains to guard it well. This little creature is often seen sitting bolt upright outside his hole, keeping a sharp lookout for enemies, and barking like a little dog when alarmed.

Reddy was telling Eric all about these little wood-folk as they went along, and it did not seem far to the tree in which Reddy had built his house.

Eric, if he had bothered his head about it at all, had thought that squirrels lived in hollow trees; so it was quite a surprise to him to find that Reddy had a really, truly house, which he and Mrs. Reddy had built before the young ones came. First there was a platform laid of sticks, which the squirrels had bit off with their sharp little teeth. This was carpeted with leaves and moss, and then there was a roof. The roof was wonderfully made, and woven so that it was quite water-proof. The young squirrels were born here, and would live with their parents until next spring, when they would set up a house for themselves.

Now you know squirrels pair for life; they do not change their partners every season, as so many ani-



mals do—and they are very affectionate little creatures. So when Eric and Reddy arrived at the foot of the tree they found Mrs. Squirrel out looking anxiously about for Reddy. “Oh, I am so relieved,” she began. “I thought you might have fallen into the clutches of old Mr. Cat”—and then seeing their visitor she stopped. But Reddy reassured her, and soon she was frisking around looking curiously at Eric, peeking at his cap, his tiny feet, and like her husband she found him very amusing. But Mrs. Reddy was more polite than Reddy. He had fairly shrieked with laughter when he first saw the tiny Elf, but she contented herself with laughing behind her tail at him. When she saw how good-natured Eric appeared, and how hungry he looked, she asked him up to the nest to have some nuts.

Eric was introduced to the young family. There were four of them, and they chased each other about, jumping and doing all sorts of gymnastics, until they had Eric fairly holding his sides with laughter at their antics. Then Reddy showed him his store of nuts, and Eric ate until he was quite satisfied. The little host insisted on his filling his pockets, so that he had food to last him for several days at least.

Now you may think it very strange that a boy could live on nuts and a few berries. But when Eric was turned into an Elf that fateful day, he not only looked like an Elf, but he also took on all the habits of the little wood creatures.

So it was with much gratitude that he accepted the nuts from Reddy Squirrel, and after taking leave of the squirrel family set out for his home in the owl's nest.

All this was passing through Eric's mind this morning as he sat in the tree just outside the owl's nest. So busy was he with these thoughts that he did not notice the approach of two farmers who had seated themselves under the old oak. Their voice aroused him. The elder one was saying: "The wild-geese are flying now, it's a good time to capture them to add to our flock."

"But how?" asked the younger. "Why, it's simple enough," answered the other.

"When the flock alights on the north marsh as they always do, we will catch them in nets and clip their wings."

Now when Eric heard this he felt very sorry for the wild geese, for he knew what a disgrace they would consider it to be forced to live among tame geese. There are no creatures that love their freedom more than wild geese, and every spring they take long journeys north. The more Eric thought about this the more did he wish that he might help them. It was not long before the chance came.

Far out from over Lake Ontario came a flock of wild geese. They flew in a wedge-shaped mass following one who was the leader. Perhaps you have noticed how noisy a flock of wild geese always is, and it was the same with this one. They were chattering and joking among themselves. "Let us alight on that marsh," called one to the leader.

"Yes, yes," answered Yota, for that was her name. "We will rest awhile."

Down they came in one swoop, and brushed so near to the tree that Eric could hear the flutter of their wings.

"Now," thought he, "is my chance." Nimbly he slid

from the tree, and made his way to the marsh. There they were, the whole flock of them. And Eric noticed how pretty they were. Their heads were dark and shiny. A collar of white encircled the neck; and their backs were brown tinged with deep blue. They lay in the water and gulped the half-rotted sea-weed. They delved into the bottom and brought up small fish. Gaily they chatted among themselves. Eric approached to the very edge of the water. Finally the eye of one of the geese nearest chanced to fall on him. He stopped in amazement.

"Why, whatever in the world is this?" he asked. "Yota, Yota," he called, "what is the name of this tiny creature?"

Now the leader of the flock of geese is always a wise old goose. She is usually years older than the others, and has had more experience; it is for that reason she is chosen leader. The rest of the geese always refer to her, and abide by her decisions. And so it was with Yota. At once she said "Why that's an Elf, an Elf of the forest. He is a very harmless little creature."

With that the whole flock came close to Eric, who, by this time was a little embarrassed with so many eyes upon him. But he managed to whisper to Yota the warning about the old farmer, who intended to catch them, and hold them prisoners by clipping their wings.

This news was received with horror by the wild geese, and such a cackling arose that Eric thought the farmer must surely hear, and would be along at once. But Yota soon quieted them and gave the word to start at once—and then she paused—but what of the little Elf who had so kindly warned them? Surely they owed him much—their liberty, which they prized more

than life itself. Coming close to Eric Yota said, "We are indeed grateful to you, and anything that you may ask of us we will grant, if it is in our power to do so."

Now Eric was very much taken with this flock of wild geese, not only were they very beautiful to see, but also he felt that they were faithful creatures, and would keep their word. Never had he heard of wild



But he managed to whisper to Yota the warning.

geese doing any living thing harm. They were not birds of prey—they did not destroy crops. In fact they stood at the head of all the wild birds in his estimation. So when Yota put it to him thus he answered quickly, "Oh, I should love to go with you."



Now the wild geese had certainly not expected **this**. But Yota was a goose of her word. "It is possible," she said, "but first I must tell you that we journey far, far north of the Hudson Bay up into the Arctic regions, and the hardships are many. We are often hungry, we are chased by foxes and other wild creatures, and we are sometimes storm-driven. But if you still wish to come with us, we shall treat you as one of ourselves."

Eric was so delighted that he jumped up and down with joy, for always he had wanted to explore those north regions, and to go on the backs of the wild geese was more than he had ever dreamed.

## CHAPTER VII

### RICE LAKE.

**S**O it was settled. The little Elf-boy was given a seat between the wings of one of the younger geese. Tightly he clung to the goosie's neck, and he felt himself rising high into the air. He could have shouted with joy at the prospective journey.



The little Elf-boy was given a seat between the wings of one of the younger geese.

Higher and higher rose the flock of geese. Their wings beat against the air with a loud hum and faster and faster they flew until they had left the familiar wood far behind. Eric clung tightly to the goosie's neck. He kept his eyes fast shut, for he dared not look down until he had become more accustomed to the giddy height. Now they passed over the home of

the old farmer who had been the cause of their early flight—who had intended to capture them by cruelly clipping their wings. As they passed over the house they set up such a loud scolding and cackling that Farmer Green rushed out, and when he saw this fine flock of geese had escaped him, he was pretty angry, I can tell you.

Before long Eric gained courage to take a peep at what was going on about him. The old goose, Yota, travelled a little in advance. The others, of which there were about ten, formed two diverging lines behind her. Eric had his place upon the back of the third left-hand goose. At first he felt quite a little bit frightened, but soon he peeped at the earth beneath him. What a queer sight it was! It looked to Eric exactly like his mother's patch-work quilt. There were squares, and oblongs, and triangles edged with green zigzag stitches. There were light ones and dark ones, large ones and small ones. Whatever they were he could not make out, until the goose, hearing his exclamations of wonder, explained that it was fields and meadows they were passing over; the squares and oblongs and triangles being different farms, and the zigzag stitches the rail fences around them. The dark spots were the ploughed fields and the light ones the fresh green wheat and oat fields. Occasionally bright yellow ones were fields dotted with dandelions.

It was really incredible how fast these geese flew. It was not long before the landscape was changing in character. The fenced-in fields did not crowd so closely now one on the other. There were not so many brown patches, showing that the ground was not cultivated so extensively the farther north they went. There were great dark blots on the landscape, some almost of

inky blackness. "Forests," explained the wild geese, "and the lighter green around, pasture land."

Now there seemed to Eric to be bits of broken glass dropped on the green spots. Bright shining little bits here and there—and occasionally a very good sized piece. Eric hated to be bothering the geese too much with his questions, but he did so want to know how this large mirror had become shattered and strewn over the country. When the geese heard this they laughed as though it was a huge joke that the little Elf should have taken the hundreds of little lakes that dot the northern country for pieces of broken glass.

The geese by this time were becoming tired, for they had travelled many, many miles that day, and besides it was almost sundown, and a goose after sundown is no use for anything except to tuck his head under his wing and go to sleep.

In the course of the day's travel, Eric had several times heard the geese mention the rice fields, and he now realized that this was the goal for which they were making. At the head of what is called Pigeon Lake in Northern Ontario, is a short river connecting this lake with another called Sturgeon. Now in this little stretch of water are growing great fields of wild rice, and here the wild geese gather from all parts of the country. At this particular time of year that our flock travelled, the game laws protected them. So if they could only gain this marsh before the sun set they were quite safe for the night. Each one of them exerted his strength to the utmost, and reached the Bird's Paradise just as the sun was sinking over the horizon.

No sooner had they alighted and gulped a few mouthfuls of wild rice and rotted sea weed than a great



drowsiness came upon them. One by one they tucked their heads under their wings and settled themselves for the night.

But not so our friend Eric. The excitement of the day's journey had left him wide awake, and he slid softly off the goosie's back and stretched his cramped little legs. "Now," he said to himself, "I will see what kind of a country this is."

## CHAPTER VIII

### MR. MINK A CRUEL FATHER.

**T**HE rice fields proved to be a very popular spot with the wild geese, and it was evident that they expected to spend some time here. And really one could not imagine a spot better adapted to birds and animals who loved a wild life.

The lake itself was rather shallow, its marshy shores dotted with little mud islands. The rushes grew very high and among them fishes and insects hatched in great numbers. For years wild ducks and geese had gathered here from all over the country. Some coming from points at the extreme south of the continent. Among them our flock felt perfectly at home.

One day Eric was sitting on the bank of the little stream which emptied into the marsh. It was one of those warm days which come occasionally in the early spring, days which make human beings feel unaccountably lazy, but which on the contrary seem to put new life into birds and animals. The little Elf boy was thinking about nothing in particular, and was dreamily watching the flock of wild geese swimming up and down the stream. Every moment one of them would tip himself downward in the funniest manner until he seemed to be almost standing on his head in the water. Then up he would come the next second with his beak full of rotted seaweed or perhaps a small fish. Eric was feeling the languor of these first spring days, and

was really half asleep, when something happened which caused him to become very wide awake indeed.

Now you remember the first days in the Little Wood at home, when Eric lived with Tawny Owl, also you remember the terrible fright he had that night when Willy Weasel came prowling around the owl's nest, and how he had frightened old Weasel away by throwing bones in the old villain's face. Remembering this, you will appreciate the terror which took possession of Eric when he saw what he thought was a weasel coming out from under an overhanging bank. There was the same pointed head and long, snake-like body, and the same bushy tail tapering at the end. It is very easy to understand how Eric might have thought it was old Weasel again, so very much like him was this creature swimming so easily through the water. Very swiftly he swam up where the wild geese were bathing. Now Eric, thinking that his good friends, the wild geese, were in danger, shouted a warning to them. But they only turned their heads slightly and looked at the creature and went calmly on swimming and diving.

After the intruder has passed one of the geese came to the bank on which Eric was sitting and while preening and drying her feathers, said: "That was Mr. Mink who passed just then. He could not do us geese any harm. He is a first cousin of Mr. Weasel, and looks so very much like him too. His fur is very valuable, and Mr. Mink has been so hunted the last few years that if it goes on it won't be long until the family will be extinct. Hunters set traps for them all along the streams, and they sometimes take whole families at once."



You will appreciate the terror which took possession of him.

Eric began to feel very sorry for Mr. Mink on hearing what a hunted creature he was. But the goose continued. "You need not feel too sorry for Mr. Mink for he has one terrible habit. Papa Mink often kills his own babies! Poor Mamma Mink tries to protect her children, and often hides them away until they are big enough to protect themselves. But it's very seldom that Mamma Mink is able to bring up her whole family, the cruel father nearly always managing to kill one or two of them."



When Eric heard this he did not feel sorry for him at all, and the fact that he looked so much like Weasel made him dislike him all the more.

What a bloodthirsty lot they were, thought Eric, so different from his good friends, the wild geese. Certainly he was fortunate to have been befriended by the flock.

*Eric Pallys*

## CHAPTER IX

### ERIC VISITS MR. COON'S FAMILY.

**I**N the neighborhood in which Eric lived in his little boy days, a farmer had trapped a family of coons. He had killed them all but one, which he had kept as a pet. Eric and all the other little boys around used to flock to the old farmer's barn to see the coon. This coon was about half grown, and was so intelligent that he soon became quite a pet. The farmer's son had taught him to open doors like a monkey, and he roamed about the place as any other pet. But he soon grew too bold. He would enter the pantry and help himself to anything he might see. He became so mischievous that nothing about the house was safe from his inquisitive little nose. So Farmer Green had been forced to get rid of him.

Now when Eric had met old Mr. Coon one night down by the marsh, of course he thought at once of the little pet he had known, and was all the more anxious to see the coon's babies. So it was with great satisfaction that he set out with Mr. Coon to visit his home in the wood.

It was not far to the coon's house, and soon Mr. Coon was pointing out the old huge tree in which his family lived. As they drew near, Eric could see the cunning baby coons sunning themselves on a limb just outside the nest. One of them lay sprawled out on the tree with his hind feet hanging on each side, and his fore paws grasping tightly the branch. But no sooner had they caught sight of the father coon coming up

the tree with the frog in his mouth, than there was a great scrambling of little coons, and they all gathered about the old one. "Err-err" they coaxed, this being the sound that little coons always make when begging for food. Old Mr. Coon divided the frog among them as best he could, and when they had eaten it they began to take notice of our friend Eric. Of course, it had to be explained to them that Eric was an Elf, and that he meant them no harm. He told them how he had travelled north with the wild geese, how he had grown to love the wild creatures. Then Mother Coon and the little ones set themselves out to entertain their young guest. The little coons, I have told you, are a most playful lot, and the fun was at its height, when Mother Coon noticed that one of her babies was missing.

A splash from without brought them all to the door, and in a moment they discovered that one of the little coons had fallen into the water. As the water was very shallow, he had no trouble in scrambling out, but Mother Coon was much concerned, and making her way down the tree, nosed the little one about until she was able to get him in front of her, and half push him up the tree into the nest. I have told you that the coons are a very affectionate family, so there was great excitement when Baby Coon was brought up to the nest wet and complaining loudly. But it was soon found that the little fellow was more frightened than hurt, and before long all were happy once more.

"You know," said Eric to Old Mr. Coon, looking around him at the circle of little Coons, "Your children look so very much to me like little bears, I hope you don't mind my speaking of it."

"No indeed," answered Mr. Coon, "and it's not at all strange that they should, for the Bear family are relatives of ours. In fact I think we are first cousins. We have lots of traits in common. In the first place, our fur is somewhat the same, being thick and woolly, only ours is much finer. We both hibernate during the cold months. By that I mean that we stay in our nests, and sleep most of the time away. And then," said Mr. Coon, looking rather guilty, "you know we both have a sweet tooth. We coons are very fond of sweet corn, while our cousins the bears—well—I can't think of anything a bear would not do for a chunk of honey."

Eric laughed heartily at this, and said that if liking honey had anything to do with it, he believed that he, too, must be some relation of Mr. Bear's.

## CHAPTER X

### MR. SKUNK.

ERIC had found the Coon family so entertaining that he had stayed much longer than he had intended. It was almost night when he hurriedly bade Mrs. Coon and the little Coons good-bye, and started out for the marsh. Old Mr. Coon insisted on accompanying him, and so they set out together, stepping briskly along.

"Oof," said Eric, stopping suddenly and drawing in his breath, "I smell a skunk!"

"I don't doubt it," said Mr. Coon. "You will find plenty of them in these parts."

"I never saw one," said Eric, "and I don't think I ever want to. The smell is enough for me."

"Do you know," answered Mr. Coon, "the skunk is the most misunderstood creature I know of. He really is such a harmless little fellow that there is no reason whatever for his being ostracized as he is."

"But the smell," insisted Eric. "Why I would run miles if a skunk were after me."

"That's just where you are mistaken. You never will have to run from Mr. Skunk. If you let him alone, he will let you alone. You may depend upon that. He has never been known to attack any living creature, except in self-defense. And as for the unpleasant perfume that the skunk uses, I will tell you about that.

"In the first place he is such a slow-witted creature that Nature has given him that scent bag to protect himself. It really is a very large gland around the





Mr. Skunk stopped suddenly and faced about

tail that produces this unpleasant smelling liquid you spoke of. Now Mr. Skunk uses this only when he is attacked, just as a porcupine does his quills, and he always gives you fair warning."

"If what you say is true of Mr. Skunk, I should like to see him," said Eric, when Mr. Coon had finished.

"I think you are going to have your wish then, for if I am not mistaken, he is not very far from us at this moment." Hardly had he finished speaking than there was a crackling of branches and twigs, and a big collie dog crashed through the brush. Suddenly the dog stopped, and there, not ten feet from him stood Mr. Skunk.

And then Eric saw what Mr. Coon meant by his giving warning. With the dog in close pursuit, Mr. Skunk stopped suddenly, faced about and stamped on the ground with his two front feet. So much for warning number one. As the collie showed no sign of retreating, Mr. Skunk was forced to use his own weapon. He raised his beautiful bushy tail, waved it threateningly, and the shower of burning stinging liquid was thrown into the collie's face. There was no hesitation now on the part of the dog. He dashed into the river and rolled wildly about, and then made off howling loudly. The pain in his eyes was blinding for a time, and he returned to his home smelling to the skies. But Mr. Collie had had his lesson.

"Oh!" explained Eric, who had been an interested spectator to this little tragedy, "the poor dog."

"Well," the coon answered, "that is the only way he knows of protecting himself, and you may be sure that it was the dog who started things. Just look at Mr. Skunk, what chance has he with an animal like the collie, did he not resort to that means of defense?"

Eric looked at the skunk who was slowly ambling off. A more awkward, slow-witted, blundering creature it would be hard to find. He made no pretence of keeping to cover, but ran boldly out in the open.

What he saw was a creature about the size of the common house-cat, with short ears, a pointed nose, long fur and a big bushy tail. He was black in color with a thin white stripe starting at the nose and broadening out on the nape of the neck and the shoulders, running nearly to the tip of the tail. The head looked somewhat like the weasel. In fact, he is a member of the Weasel family.

Now Mr. Skunk by this time was making for home just as fast as he could go. His nest was in the side of a sandy bank. He had hollowed it out to the depth of about five or ten feet, and had lined the inside with soft grass. Here, in May or June, the little skunklets will be born, and then he will do a very queer thing. As soon as the little skunks appear, he deserts them and the mother, and will stay away until they are half grown, then will rejoin them, and the whole family wander about together, searching for food. When it becomes cold, they roll up in the nest, and pass the days in a sort of stupor until a warm spell brings them out again.

And so thus innocently enough does Mr. Skunk pass his time.

## CHAPTER XI

### ERIC HEARS ALL ABOUT "PORKY."

“**W**HATEVER in the world is that?” said Eric, gazing up into the branches of a huge hemlock tree. The little Elf was wandering about the wood this morning, looking for his friend Mr. Coon, and the object which had excited his curiosity was a queer looking bunch of something perched high up in the tree. “Looks very much to me like a hawk’s nest,” he thought. “I shall certainly have to warn the wild geese. Perhaps I’d better go up first and see. It may be a deserted nest.” Nimbly he climbed from limb to limb, and soon was within a few feet of the object. But Eric took just one look at the supposed hawk’s nest, and turning quickly around, came down that tree just as fast as his little legs would carry him.

Now Eric had never seen a porcupine, but from what he had read about them, he felt pretty certain that this bunch of grey bristles he had been approaching so confidently, was a sure enough porcupine. And he was right. Mr. Porcupine it was, and a very terrifying spectacle he presented with his thick bristling coat. Had Eric only known it, however, there was no occasion for his leaving the tree in such a terrible hurry. Mr. Porcupine is about the slowest moving creature you can imagine, and unless poked with a stick or attacked in some other manner, will make no move whatever for hours at a time.

Now pretty nearly every wild creature Eric had met

in his travels, had had something about him to admire. But Porcupine—well, it would have been pretty hard to find anything less attractive than "Quill Pig," as he is sometimes called. He measures about thirty-six inches long, and weighs from fifteen to twenty pounds. He is covered with quills, increasing from one inch long on his head to four on his back. They are hidden in the wool, and there are about a thousand quills in one animal. His short tail, too, is covered with quills, and when he becomes angry he thrashes it about, and woe unto anyone or anything that comes in contact with it. For the quills are very loosely attached and easily driven into the enemy. These quills are poisonous and very hard to remove. A dog who has been so foolish as to come close enough to let "Porky" get at him, is pretty sure to die, unless the quills can be removed at once. This is Quill Pig's sole means of defense, and in this, you see, he is very much like Mr. Skunk. He will never attack you, but when necessary will use his poisonous quills just as Mr. Skunk does his obnoxious scent-bag.

Of course Eric did not know all this about Mr. Porcupine. In fact he had heard somewhere the Porky could throw his quills for several feet. That is why he came down that tree so quickly after one look at Porcupine. At the foot of the tree, whom should he come upon but Mr. Coon. In great excitement, Eric told him of the porcupine in the branches above, and said Eric excitedly, "I am sure he was just getting ready to throw his quills at me." Mr. Coon laughed heartily at this.

"Mr. Porcupine can't throw his quills, you funny little Elf," said he. "That's just a superstition that some people have about him.

"If he is attacked he will try to get his head under a



rock or a root, and will thrash his tail furiously, but as for the quills being thrown, that's just a fairy-tale."

"He looks like a rather stupid fellow," said Eric. "And he has not moved once since I have been here."

"He has been called 'The Stupidest Thing in the Woods,'" answered the Coon. "He will waddle into any kind of danger time and again. And you might watch him for a whole day and yet not see him move. Sometimes the Indians going on some distant errand will see a porcupine in a tree. They do not stop to get him then, for they are pretty sure that he will be in the same vicinity when they return, even if it is a week."

"But why do they want to get Mr. Porcupine," asked Eric, "if he is as harmless as you say?"

"Well, you see," said the coon, "their dogs just can't seem to let Porky alone, so the Indians kill all they see in order to protect their animals. And then, too, old Porcupine is a perfect nuisance around a lumber camp. He will wander into the camp in search of salt. You know they are very fond of salt just as the bears are of honey. As for myself, I can't see why anyone would touch either honey or salt when there is sweet corn to be had. But everyone to his own taste, I suppose."

"What does he eat besides salt?" asked Eric.

"His principal food," answered the coon, "is twigs, and the bark of the hemlock tree, also he is very fond of lily-pads."

"But how could he get at the lily-pads? Surely that clumsy looking creature can't swim."

"Yes, indeed he can," answered the Coon. "Every one of those quills acts like a barrel. You see they are hollow, and Porky floats around quite easily, propelling himself with his feet."



He came down that tree as fast as his little legs would carry him.

"Do tell me about the baby porcupines," said Eric. "I am sure they must be cunning, though Mr. Porcupine himself is so ugly."

"Well," said Mr. Coon, "I don't believe you could say the little Porkies are very beautiful either. In the first place there are never more than two of them, and they are of a monstrous size when born. They are actually larger than the young Black Bear at birth. And they are just as slow and stupid as their mother as far as I can see."

"It does seem that Mr. Porcupine is a harmless sort of creature," said Eric, "and I suppose he must be of some use in the world, or he would not be here. I'm going to watch him while he stays around here, and perhaps I'll find out."

Now you or I might have told Eric or Mr. Coon the reason for Mr. Porcupine's existence, and why of late years he has been protected by the game laws made by man. The Porcupine lives in the woods where few other animals are found, and he is very good to eat. In the regions of the frozen north, trappers and hunters sometimes lose the trail for days at a time, and the only food they have been able to obtain has been the Porcupine. And so you see Porky too, justifies his existence.

## CHAPTER XII

### WABASSO, THE SNOW-SHOE HARE.

**O**UT of a dense willow-thicket came the little Brown Hare. Hippety-hop he went into the moonlit space beyond the hedge. Up on his little back legs he sat, and twitching his long ears, one this way, and one that, listened for a moment intently. Presently from the same thicket, and in the same manner, came another hare, followed by two more, and



To a hare, speed is everything.

then three, until finally in the soft gleam of the moonlight frisked a circle of little Brown Hares. They skipped and frolicked like a lot of children playing tag. Into the thicket and out again they hopped, intent upon their silent game of chase.

Suddenly they stopped. Each one sat on his furry back legs and listened. Something had startled them,

and they held themselves poised ready for flight. Had you not been so intent on the rabbits and their game you would have seen peering out of the willow-thicket a wistful little face—a human face, but ever so tiny; a pair of eyes that eagerly followed the movements of the frisking rabbits, and a pair of tiny hands, which in their excitement had been clapped sharply together. And this was the sound which had startled the hares.

Perhaps you may have guessed that the hands belonged to Eric, and also the wistful little face. Now if you have been following Eric on his journey with the wild geese, and have met all the wood-creatures he has met, you must have realized by this time that a little boy suddenly taken from his home and thrown upon his own resources was not to be envied. Also you must have wondered if he did not sorely miss playfellows of his own age. And you would have been quite right. For though Eric had become wonderfully attached to all the wild creatures, and really in a way loved the life he led, there were times when the little boy's heart yearned for playmates and a good old-time frolic.

And so, on this beautiful moonlight night when he came upon the little gathering of frolicking hares, his heart leaped with joy, and it was all he could do to restrain his mirth. But when he saw that one soft little hand clap had stopped their game he felt indeed sorry, and crawling carefully out of the thicket, stood up bravely in the moonlight.

"I did not mean to stop your game," he began timidly, "but you seem to be having such fun that I just couldn't help clapping my hands."

When the hares heard the voice and realized that the little intruder spoke their own language they all



pressed closely about him, for of course he must be an Elf. And had not their mothers and grandmothers always told them that the Elves and Fairies were their very own people? Then Eric told them how he was traveling with the wild geese, and that although they were very good to him and he loved them dearly, he often longed for a good romp with creatures of his own age.

At that one of the hares touched him lightly on the arm, and then began one of the wildest, merriest games you ever could wish to see. The little Elf darted among them so quickly that he won the respect of all the



She came quietly over to Eric.

hares, for you know, to a hare speed is everything. He also taught them a game of leap-frog, and in this they soon became so proficient that the leaps grew to a span of ten feet or more.

After an hour or so of the jolliest frolicking a boy ever had, they became tired, and one by one slipped quietly off into the thicket. All but one; as the others disappeared she came quietly over to Eric and said:

"You have indeed won the good will of all my family, and I hope that we shall have many a game together."

Then Eric thanked her for the happy hour. As they talked together Eric could see that she was very much older than the rest of the hares. Her coat was of a reddish color, with white beneath, and each foot bore a heavy, flat looking growth of fur. The ears were long and very flexible. The longer Eric looked, the more he realized how different the little hare was from the kind he used to see in the little wood at home. He could not help remarking this to the hare, and it was then she told him this remarkable story of the Snowshoe Rabbit or Varying Hare.

Up in the Hudson Bay district, where the winters are bitterly cold, the wild creatures sometimes have a desperate fight for existence. The deep snow which covers up the food supplies, also makes the land a flat deceiving waste. Great ravines are bridged over by the levelling snow, and thus many creatures are trapped to their deaths in these hidden ravines. But Nature finds many ways to protect her children, and the simplest of all is that of providing the little hare with a pair of snowshoes. When the winter sets in the little rabbit begins a heavy shaggy growth on its feet, and by the time the snow has arrived he is provided with this means of crossing the treacherous snow drifts.

But this is not the only change in the little hare. Against the white snow his brown coat would stand out too plainly for the little animal's safety, and so, gradually, he sheds his dark coat and takes on a pure white one. Thus does Mother Nature prepare one of her children for the Northern winter. The Snowshoe Rabbit is some times called Varying Hare, and it is thought that he is the "Wabasso" of Longfellow's "Hiawatha."

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## CHAPTER XIII

### MR. FOX CATCHES A GOOSE.

**I**N the vicinity of the marsh occupied by our wild geese, lies a stretch of woodland. Not a dense forest by any means, but just a nice bit of copse with open sunny patches here and there, making a perfect playground for the wild creatures that live there. Few wild animals like a dense forest, and this particular bit of wood was one of the favorite haunts of Old Squire Fox.

Mr. Fox's den was in this wood. Now, if you were walking through, the chances are that you would never guess you were anywhere near a fox's home. Mr. Fox has placed his nest so cunningly, and covered up all traces so well, that few human eyes are sharp enough to discover it. I think I should be giving away no secret, if I tell you that the hole in the first place belonged to Mr. Woodchuck. Foxes very often use discarded woodchucks' holes, enlarging them, of course, digging several different tunnels leading from them. For Mr. Fox, who is a very cunning fellow, doesn't intend to be surprised and trapped in his home if he can help it. The nest itself he lines with grass, and it is very much to his credit, that he keeps his house scrupulously clean, carrying out every bit of refuse and disposing of it outside the hole.

Now this particular fox lived in a hole not far from the marsh. For nearly a week now, the old fellow had had his eye on the flock of wild geese resting there, and he had made daily trips to the marsh hoping to



Sneaking through the bushes came Mr. Fox.

take them unawares. But as night came on, and they grew sleepy, they always settled themselves far enough out from the shore to be just out of his reach, and the best he had been able to do thus far, was to stand on the shore and lick his chops at the sight of the nice fat creatures, thinking all the while what a good meal one of them would make. It seems as if he just cannot give up the thought of that dainty morsel, and so once again, just at dusk, he leaves his hole and starts out for the marsh.

The course he takes is a zigzag one, sniffing at all the thickets and hedges as he passes, in hopes that he may surprise a mouse or even a rabbit. On he goes searching the wind with his nose, hopping into the air that he may look about him. Now he finds the fresh track of a rabbit, and follows it for a time. But it is seldom that he catches Bunny, for the rabbit is swifter than he. At the slightest click of a twig he stops, and standing like a statue, holds one foot in the air with a wonderful grace.

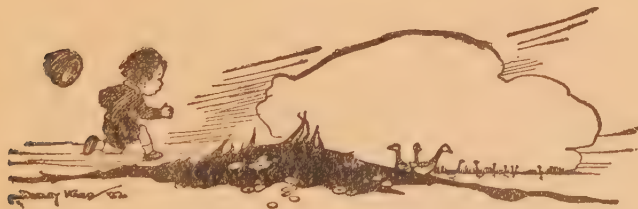
Now, Mr. Fox had been so cunning all this time, that the geese had no idea he was in the neighborhood. You may be sure he did not show himself. No indeed! He was too sly for that. Even Eric had never had one glimpse of him. And so—feeling themselves so secure, the geese began to grow careless. Instead of going out into the open water for the night, they rested nearer and nearer the shore, until on this fateful night, they were scarcely ten feet out. Presently, sneaking through the bushes came Mr. Fox. He could hardly believe his eyes. An old log extended out into the water, and near the end, rested a nice fat goose.

Now, the little Elf had just left the flock of geese, and was going to spend an hour with the hares. Look-

ing back towards the marsh, he saw to his surprise, what he thought was a big yellow dog. Queer thing that! Where could that dog have come from when no farms were near? Anyway he would just go back and warn the geese that the dog was in the neighborhood.

It was not at all to be wondered at that Eric mistook the fox for a dog. Standing still, Mr. Fox looked very much like a dog. There was the pointed nose, the shaggy golden yellow coat, dark buff legs, and black feet. All of which any Collie dog might have possessed.

With his eyes on the dog, Eric retraced his steps. He had only gone a little way, when the statue-like figure of the animal moved. And then fear struck the heart of the little Elf-boy. All likeness to a dog vanished. The crafty sneaking manner and zigzag course with which he approached the geese, proclaimed him what he was—and it was with terror Eric realized that it



Eric ran quickly toward the marsh.

was a fox, not a dog, he had to deal with. His one thought was for the poor geese. His little legs would not carry him fast enough and before he could call to the geese, he saw the fox crouch on the log and spring for the goose nearest him. The frightened squawk of the flock broke the stillness, as they of one

accord rose in the air. All but one. The poor unfortunate goosie had fallen prey to Mr. Fox. Swiftly, Squire Fox made for the wood, the goose in his mouth. He would seek the safety of his den before killing it.

"What shall I do?" cried Eric, as the fox brushed past the hedge in which he was hiding. And what could a little creature as helpless as he do? In his fear and anguish at seeing the goosie carried away by the fox, Eric cried aloud. But the words came to Mr. Fox as a squeak. Instantly he stopped. A mouse! Surely this was his lucky day. Well, he might as well have both the mouse and the goose. So firmly putting the goose on the ground, he placed his right foot upon her, and began nosing about in the hedge for the mouse.

So close was he that Eric could almost feel the swish of his beautiful bushy tail. And then came to him an idea! Bracing his feet firmly against the ground he put his two little hands out and quickly grasping the waving tail, gave it two sharp jerks!

Now old Mr. Fox was so astonished that he took his foot from the imprisoned goose. Never before had he suffered such indignity! What kind of an animal could have dared molest him? When he again thought of the goose, he turned quickly. But it was too late. Up in the air high above his head rose the frightened goosie, and Mr. Fox fairly frothed at the mouth in rage and disappointment.

Eric began to realize that it was time for him to look out for his own safety. Seeing a small willow-tree close at hand, he nimbly climbed to the top, and sat there watching Mr. Fox. That fox was the maddest thing you ever saw. He thrashed about through the hedge, this way and that, looking for the creature



who had tweaked his tail. Of course he never thought of looking in the branches above.

After an hour of this fruitless rage, he gave it up and slunk off towards the wood. And Eric, sliding quickly from the tree, ran toward the marsh. He must find the geese. He knew they would be anxious for his safety.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE FIGHT OF THE WEASELS.

WHEN Eric returned to the flock of geese after his experience with Old Squire Fox, he found them very much excited. The goosie who had escaped from the fox had come back with a badly bruised wing. He told the geese of his horrible experience with the fox and how the little Elf had actually saved his life.

"Had it not been for our friend Eric," he concluded, "I should have now been in old Fox's stomach."

Then the old goose Yota drew them all about her and spoke. "I fear the marsh is no longer safe for us. Once Old Fox is on our trail, we shall have no peace. As soon as Goosie's wing is healed we shall depart."

When Eric heard the decision of Yota he was very sorry, although he knew she was in the right. But he had made so many friends among the animals in the vicinity, that he felt quite sorry to leave them. There was Mr. Coon, surely he could never find another so very wise. Why, Mr. Coon seemed to know everything! He had told Eric the history of Jimmy Skunk, Mr. Porcupine, Marmot Woodchuck, and the hares. Ah! there too were friends he should be sorry to leave. The happy frolics with Wabasso and the other hares in the moonlight—where would he meet such delightful companions again?

But when he looked at the poor maimed goosie, and realized that perhaps he would not be so fortunate again as to be able to save her from the fox, he said

never one word against it. So it was decided that as soon as Goosie's wing healed, they should take flight for regions farther north. Meanwhile, Eric made up his mind to stay close by the geese, and see that no further harm befell them.

Now it was a pity that the geese were not able to leave that very night. For there was another enemy close by that they knew nothing about, and, had Eric known, I am sure he would have been the most eager of all to leave. Old Squire Fox was bad enough, but if one stayed awake and did not get too near the shore, Mr. Fox would not be able to do much harm. But this other—he could swim as well as climb trees.

Now you know how frightened Eric had been of Willy Weasel. Ever since his encounter with Weasel that night in the owl's nest, he had dreaded his very name. Not that he knew so very much about Weasel—it just seemed to be an instinctive dread which he could not overcome.

Perhaps if you knew a little of Weasel's habits, you might better understand why he is feared by all the smaller animals, and some of the larger ones too. Of all the creatures of the wood, Weasel has not one friend. When you hear about him, you will agree that he does not deserve one.

His looks to begin with are very much against him. His nose is pointed, his forehead low, and his small beady eyes always seem to be shining with an angry light. His very long slender neck, which he waves from side to side, makes one think of nothing so much as a serpent, as does also the thin sinuous body. Why, just one look at Weasel is enough to tell you that he means no good! His one thought is to hunt and kill. While other animals destroy to satisfy hunger, Weasel

kills for the mere joy of slaughter. He takes pleasure in the dying squeak of his victim. A weasel will establish himself in one spot and stay until he has killed everything in the vicinity, and then he will move on to new territory.

In the winter, Weasel takes on a new coat—a perfectly white one. This, of course, is so that he may not be seen so plainly against the snow. With his coat he changes his name, and is called Ermine. Fortunately, weasels are not so very numerous, the reason being that in their passion to take life, they often kill each other. And so you see the little Elf-boy's dread of the creature was not unwarranted.

This night the geese selected the very middle of the marsh for their resting-place, far enough out to be safe from Mr. Fox. Hardly had the sun set, than as usual, the geese one by one went off to sleep. Eric comfortably seated on the back of his favorite goose, began his vigil.

Things went very well for the first few hours, and he was just thinking that he might take a few winks himself, when a slight sound from the shore startled him. Peering into the darkness all he could make out was a pair of beady eyes shining like green fire. At first he thought it might be the fox. But no, the eyes were too small. Down to the water-edge came the animal, whatever it was—and then, as a long snaky head waved back and forth, Eric realized with horror that his old enemy Willy Weasel was at hand.

Trembling, he waited, thinking that the weasel might not notice the geese on the marsh. But he knew they were discovered when Weasel, crawling out on the

log, stopped and looked toward the flock. Had Eric only known it, it was not the geese who were attracting the weasel's attention at that moment. Weasel's eyes were fastened on a spot much nearer shore.

Stealthily out of the water, at the extreme end of the log, came another pointed head—then a second pair of green shining eyes. A long thin neck waved back and forth, and a slender snake-like body glided over the end of the log. Another weasel appeared.

"Now," thought Eric, as his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, and he made out two animals, "I am



The two weasels fell upon each other.

afraid we are going to have a very bad time of it. I shall certainly have to awaken the geese." He turned to look at the injured goosie, wondering just how far he could fly, if fly he could at all.

Suddenly a loud hiss, followed by a savage snarl broke the silence. And then Eric was witness to one



of the most savage fights he had ever beheld. The two weasels fell upon each other, and bit and tore, and fought in a most shocking manner. So long did the fight keep up that Eric became almost sickened with the sight. At the end of half an hour, only one weasel remained on the log, the other had rolled off dead into the water. The remaining one lay quiet for a few moments, and then dragged himself off into the thicket. For the time being his lust for blood was satisfied.

Eric shuddered as he pressed close under the goosie's wing. Yota was right. The marsh was no longer safe for them. The sooner they could leave it the better.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE GEESE FIND A NEW RESTING PLACE.

THE sun was just peeping over the hills when the flock of geese awoke—Eric with them. It was found that the injured goosie's wing had healed so quickly that he could fly rather slowly, but still well enough for them to continue on their journey. After making a meal of the wild rice that grew so plentifully in the marsh, the flock arose in the air, their wings making a loud hum. Yota herself, carried Eric on her back, and Eric knew this was a mark of great favor, and that the geese were pleased with him.

High above the marsh they flew, over the wood in which the fox had his den, and where he slept. At the very edge of the wood they dropped rather low, and there at the foot of the old elm tree, Eric saw his friend Mr. Coon. Rising to his feet he waved his hand and called "Good-bye, Mr. Coon, I'll see you again next year! I'll see you again next year!" But the coon only shook his head. A year to him was a pretty long time. Much might happen in a year, and he had been fond of his little friend.

On they went over the hills and forests. Rivers seemed like bits of ribbon, and the whole landscapes looked to Eric like one of his mother's patch work quilts. There were squares and oblongs, some light and some dark. The light ones were fields of buckwheat, the dark ones, ploughed ground. Soon the fields became more irregular, the forests grew thicker and the ground rose in huge boulders.

The geese flew more slowly than was their wont on account of the injured one, but nevertheless they covered a great stretch of territory in the day's flight, and it seemed to Eric that they were going very fast indeed. They chattered among themselves as they flew, remarking about the farms they passed over, and the flocks of tame geese which they occasionally saw in a millpond. And Eric found that they held the tame ones in great contempt. The heavy lumbering creatures that he saw waddling along the streams—certainly they did not compare with his beautiful flock.

As they flew they kept up a good-natured chattering—a constant gobbling goose-talk, which made Eric think of the country sewing society to which his mother belonged.

It would soon be night now, and Yota was keeping a sharp look-out for a safe spot in which to obtain their supper and spend the night.

Geese are very methodical creatures. In their journeys they stop always twice a day for food, once just before nightfall. Then, when they have eaten their fill, they drop off to sleep almost at once. Hunters knowing their regular habits, take advantage of this and usually hunt them at the lazy hour.

You may think, then, that geese being such sleepy creatures are easily caught. But the least sound awakens them, and they are up and on wing in an instant. You have often heard the expression "a wild goose chase," and anyone who has ever hunted them can appreciate it.

Year after year geese will visit the same spots, and often a rank growing swamp will provide a meeting-place for geese from all parts of the continent.

Now our flock had planned to spend the summer

in the rice-fields. But as you know Mr. Fox had made it so unpleasant for them—to say nothing of Weasel—that they had been forced to leave that spot rather hurriedly. Yota, it must be confessed, was at loss. Where should they spend the night?

Finally she stopped over a swampy inlet and called “Honk! Honk!” which in goose talk means, “We will alight.” Then arose a great chattering among the others. They broke ranks turning somersaults and



The geese flew more slowly on account of the injured one.

gradually settled softly on the surface of the water. After the geese had eaten their fill of the small fish and rotted sea-weed which they found in the swamp, they settled themselves for the night.

Eric, wandering along the shore, found a fine lot of berries, and was about to return to the flock, when a call from the wood caused him to stop. “T’Who!

Who-o! Whoo-o!" Surely that was the familiar voice of his old friend Tawny Owl. Running quickly to the spot from which the call issued, he found a hollow tree, almost exactly like the old elm at home, and there, just as it happened before, sat Tawny Owl.

Now Eric had long ago given up his old friend as dead, so he was overjoyed to find him again. Tawny also gave signs of satisfaction. He ruffled his beautiful neck-feathers, flapped his great soft wings, and asked Eric to come up to his nest. When Eric was comfortably seated in the opening Tawny told him why that night in the Little Wood at home he had been forced to leave so unceremoniously.

While hunting for mice in a neighboring field, he had been attacked by hawks. They had pursued him so persistently that he had been forced farther and farther from his home, until he had found himself in an entirely new country.

Then Eric in turn told him of the geese. How after befriending them and saving them from capture, he had induced them to take him with them on their journey north. He told Tawny of the rice-fields, and how they had been driven out by Old Squire Fox. "If this part of the country is half as interesting as that was, I shall be glad," said Eric.

"Of course," answered the owl, "You have seen Mother Blackbear and her family. They are the most interesting folks I know of around here." But Eric told him that the Geese had just arrived, but that he should like to hear about Mrs. Blackbear. He was not so sure, though, whether he cared to meet her personally or not. All he had known about bears, had been from his story books, and he had concluded that they were very dangerous creatures. But the owl



assured him that this was not true of the Blackbears, and promised on the morrow to show him the Bear Trail. .



Tawny told him why he had been forced to leave so unceremoniously.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE BEAR TREE.

ONE of the wildest, most unfrequented spots in north-western Canada, is that region lying about Great Bear Lake. One could imagine all sorts of wild creatures living in this district, entirely unmolested by man. The thick bush, the forests, the natural caves formed by huge rocks, the swamps and weeded water-ways, all afford shelter to animals who shun man and love solitude.

Rather strange, then, seemed the presence of a trail leading from the edge of this lake straight through the bush and dense woods. A broad well-worn trail, made, it would appear by man. If one examined the trail closely, huge flat foot marks showing occasionally in the soft dirt would surely strengthen the impression that the trail was of human origin.

But stop! As we follow the beaten path, we find it leading under bushes and trees that would cause a man to stoop or crawl on his hands and knees in dozens of places, where, by stepping a little aside he might have walked upright. Surely no man would do this. What other creature then could have made these big flat tracks resembling man? What other indeed but that creature known to all countries and ages—the bear?

This particular trail leading from the lake where Eric and the geese had alighted, had been made many years ago by one of the bear tribe. It is hard to say just how old that trail might be—perhaps fifty—perhaps one hundred years—a long time it was at any

rate, for the track was well-worn, and evidently led down to the bear's favorite watering-place.

It is a peculiar fact about bears, that if one bear, fifty years ago crossed a log at a certain point, every other bear in following years is likely to do so also. If it is at all possible, a bear will never leave the beaten track. The trail always lacks head-room, one way in which a bear's tracks can always be told.

Now Eric's old friend, Tawny Owl, whom he had again met in these parts, as you know promised to show him Mr. Bear's trail. Eric was so eager to see the trail that it was all he could do to wait until morn-



"We will start at the lake," said the owl.

ing and the sun was scarcely up when he left the geese and arrived at Tawny's retreat.

"We will start at the lake," said the owl, "and follow Mr. Black Bear to his den."

Eric looked a little doubtful at this. You see he had read many stories of bears in his little boy days, and nearly every one of them had pictured the bear as a very dangerous animal. So he naturally was not very anxious to meet Mr. Bear face to face. Only he did want to see that trail. He said something of this to the owl.

"Hoot! Hoot!" laughed Tawny. "So you are afraid of Mr. Bear? Why he is one of the shyest, timidest creatures of the wood, and will run away from you every time. To be sure, there are bears that are dangerous.

"The Grizzly is one of the worst. But the small Black Bear that you find in these parts will never hurt you."

Tawny Owl was quite right about this. The small black bear found in most parts of Canada is harmless if not molested. Of course any creature in self-defense becomes malicious. Mr. Black Bear does not eat flesh at all unless hard-pressed for food. He much prefers roots and the tender juicy stems of plants, berries, corn, and above all honey. He is never happier than when rifling a bee's nest. The bees cannot penetrate his thick hide, and Bruin eats honey, bees and all.

But the Grizzly Bear is a very different being indeed. He eats mostly flesh, and grows to a huge size and is quite ferocious. He will attack man often without provocation.

The story is told of a hunter in the Rocky Mountains, who was knocked insensible by a Grizzly. The

man was leading a horse. The bear killed the horse and ate half the carcass. Digging a hole he put the man in and piled earth upon him. Then he went away into the forest. When the man came to, he found himself "dead and buried." As the earth was only lightly thrown over him, he managed to scramble out and found close beside him the half eaten horse.

Thinking that it might be the bear's next meal time, and that he had probably been put by in the larder for the next meal, he lost no time in getting back to camp—and you may be sure he did not trouble Grizzly again.

Now it was probably of this species of bear that Eric had read, and it was not to be wondered at that he was somewhat loath to hunt the bear. Consequently, it was with some misgiving that he started out with the owl.



The Grizzly Bear grows to a huge size.



But he soon forgot his fears in the interesting things he saw. The bears seemed to have almost stepped in each other's footsteps, so little did the trail vary—over logs and across brooks, through a thicket and into the wood.

As Eric and the Owl approached the wood, they came upon a tree from which bark had been stripped at different heights

"That's very funny," said Eric, "has someone been trying to cut that tree down?"

"Oh, no! that's the work of the bears," said Tawny. "That is what you call a 'Bear Tree.' We shall find them all along the way now. My grandmother, Old Wise Owl, once told me that that is the way the bears choose their leader. Each bear as he passes along stands on his hind feet and chews the bark as high as he can reach. The bear who manages to reach higher than all others, then is acknowledged leader. Also it is their sign language. The bears have such a highly developed sense of smell, that they can tell whether it is a friend or foe who has gone before them. A bear, in selecting his mate, often tracks her by these trees, and by the scent, is able to follow her to her retreat.

"It must have been a pretty tall bear who chewed this tree," said Eric pointing to a mark about six feet from the ground. "Are you sure it wasn't a Grizzly?" he added.

"Quite positive," answered Tawny. "When even a small bear stands upright, he seems pretty tall. Any bear can stand upright against a tree, and some bears can stand alone. Their feet are shaped very like a man's, and when they walk the sole is set flat on the ground."

Now Eric had listened to all of this with breathless interest. So engrossed had he been in the owl's story that he had not noticed a black spot which moved forward on the trail some distance ahead of him. The owl called his attention to it.

"I believe that is Old Bruin himself. He and Mrs. Bear have a family of little cubs in the cave farther along. Let us hurry, we may overtake him."

Now Eric was not a coward at all. You remember how bravely he met Mr. Fox, but somehow the sight of that bear just seemed to make the cold chills run up and down his back. Suddenly Mr. Bear turned in his tracks, and trotted along the trail toward them.

"Now," thought Eric, "my time has come. He will surely make short work of such a little creature as I."

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE LITTLE LOST BEAR.

**P**LAINLY Mr. Black Bear was troubled about something. Instead of trotting contentedly along the trail to the Lake, as was his wont, he continually turned in his tracks, retraced his steps dozens of times, and finally left the trail altogether. He crashed through the brush and shrubbery, always keeping his nose close to the ground. Occasionally he stopped and listened intently.

The reason for Bruin's strange behavior was this. Early that morning when Mrs. Bear had been busy helping Father Bear clean out their abode, one of the little bears had disappeared. First Mother Bear had hunted inside, thinking perhaps the little one, knowing that the daily bath hour was at hand, was hiding. Not until she had looked thoroughly in every recess of the cave, did she call Father Bear to her assistance.

Then the two old Bears hunted in the immediate vicinity of the cave. They called and coaxed and threatened—but still no sign of the little bear could they find.

"Perhaps he has gone to the lake," said Mr. Bear. "I'll just go out to the trail and see if he has been there."

"But he never does go there," answered Mother Bear, in a very worried tone. "Oh! dear! I am sure he is lost."

But Mr. Bear who was a very good father, tried to reassure her. "He can't have gone far in such a short time. I'll have him back here in no time."

When Old Bruin reached the trail he scented at once. And he began to feel quite reassured when for some distance he could trace the cub quite easily.

"He has gone to the lake for water, the young rascal. He deserves a good spanking for this."

But before long Mr. Bear lost the scent. At first it would seem that the little one had left the trail in places, but had returned to take it up again. Finally, however, he had abandoned the beaten track entirely. Now Old Mr. Bear became worried. The brush and undergrowth was so dense that the little cub could easily become entangled, and if forced to remain out all night, might die of exposure. He dared not return to the cave without the little one, for he knew that Mrs. Bear, who was a very affectionate mother, would be frantic. So with renewed energy he took up the quest, crushing through the brush and calling loudly at every step.

You remember we left Eric and the owl exploring the Bear Trail. Also you remember how terrified Eric had been when he saw Mr. Bear coming towards them. It was with much relief, then, that he saw Old Bruin turn off the trail and leave it entirely.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE BEAR TRAIL.

**T**HAT'S queer!" said the owl. "Usually the Bears keep pretty close to the beaten path. I wonder what the old fellow's after now. Let us go on. We'll see where the trail starts." Soon they came to a place where the trail forked, and after hesitating a moment they took the right hand one. Now, this trail circled about and led eventually back to the lake.

Suddenly Eric stopped. "Listen!" he said. "What was that?"

A faint cry, almost like a human being, came from the dense undergrowth. "It sounds like a child."

"No," answered the owl, "if I am not very much mistaken that is the cry of a baby bear. Don't see what he can be doing down there, for they seldom leave the home nest without the mother. He must surely be lost!"

Such indeed was the case. When Eric and the owl came upon the cub he was whining and crying most pitifully. At first he had thought it a great lark to be out by himself, but as he wandered farther from the trail, and the way became rougher, he was thoroughly frightened. He was so glad to see some living creature that he went with Tawny Owl and Eric quite readily.

Now when Eric saw what a pretty little creature the baby bear was he just seemed to lose all fear of the Black Bears. Surely any animal who had such adorable babies could not be very vicious. This little cub



could not have been more than three months old, and was not nearly as large as you might expect a baby bear would be.

A bear at birth is smaller in proportion than any other animal. They are seldom over eight inches long, and weigh from nine to twelve ounces. The Black Bears are covered with a soft fuzzy black fur, the muzzle changing to a light brown. They are usually very fat, and when at play tumble around like a litter of puppies.

The mother bear does not believe in spoiling her children, and cuffs and spansks them soundly when they are naughty. Their actions are more like human beings than any other animal except the monkey. When exposed to severe cold and wet the little bears often have coughs, just as any little boy might who had got his feet wet.

The bears hibernate in the winter, as Mr. Woodchuck does. Like Woodchuck, it is not the cold they fear but the lack of food. In the summer they, too, eat and eat until they are so fat that they can "den up" during the cold months when food is scarce, and live from the fat they have stored in their own bodies. A bear when he is about to retire for the winter is well fortified against the cold. He has a covering four inches deep of fat, and about the same thickness of fur.

The little ones are born while the bears are hibernating—usually there are three young ones. All through the summer they live in the cave with the mother and father bear, and are a most interesting family. The father pays very little attention to the cubs, leaving their training entirely to the mother. Occasionally there are exceptions, where Mr. Bear also has a hand in their upbringing.

All summer long the mother bear and the little ones may be seen wandering along the bear trail, eating berries and roots, going to the lake for water, and altogether passing a very happy and harmless existence. The following winter the young cubs den up with the mother, the father leaving them now for good. In the spring the young bears and the mother come out looking pretty lean. The cubs are quite well grown by this time, and soon they, too, leave the home nest and seek homes of their own.

But the little lost bear, whom Eric and the owl had found in the bush, was in his first year, and at the very cutest age a bear could be. So no wonder that Eric fell in love with him on the spot and eagerly led him back to the trail. They had not gone far when the little bear suddenly realized where he was, and darting forward disappeared under a ledge in the rock. Eric and the owl waited in silence.

Soon they heard a commotion inside. Advancing a few steps they were able to see the cave. There at the entrance was the mother bear and her cubs. When she saw that the lost one had returned she made a dive for him. Rolling him on the ground, she nosed him all over, licking him fondly all the while, the little one squealing loudly. When she found that the cub who had caused her so much anxiety was quite sound she became angry to think how worried she had been, and ended by cuffing and spanking him, just as a human mother might have done. All the while she was very careful not to really hurt the young culprit.

While this was going on Eric had been an interested spectator, and had stood in silence. But when he saw Mrs. Bear spanking her offspring it amused the little Elf-boy so that he laughed aloud.

Instantly the little bears disappeared within the cave, and the mother, hesitating only a moment, hastily followed. Evidently the motto of the bear family was, "When in doubt, run!"

## CHAPTER XIX

### MR. BLACK BEAR'S STORY.

**P**ERHAPS you have noticed, yourself, that when you have a fear of anything, you are also pretty sure to be mightily interested in that object. This was true of Eric and the bears. All his life as a little boy, he had been fascinated by anything that had to do with bears. Whenever he had visited the Zoo he had always made straight for the bear pit. His favorite stories were of bears and their doings—and when he had eaten too much cake for supper, his dreams had been troubled by these same great creatures. And now when he had the opportunity to meet Mr. Bear and his family face to face, do you wonder that he was somewhat alarmed?

After they had brought the little lost bear home, and Mother Bear had disappeared in the cave with the little ones, Eric and Tawny Owl turned to retrace their steps, when whom should they see coming from the wood but Old Father Bear! Wearily, he dragged himself along, dejection in every movement. He had not found the little bear, and what should he say to the mother?

Now when he came upon Tawny and his little companion so near the cave, he looked suspiciously at them. Especially at the little Elf-boy, who by this time was feeling pretty shaky.

"I s'pose," said he to Tawny, "that's an Elf." Then he added wearily. "Perhaps he can tell me something about our little lost Bruin."

When Eric saw how worried Mr. Bear was about the little one, he just seemed to forget all about himself, and stepping briskly out exclaimed. "Oh! Mr. Bear, your baby is quite safe in the cave. We found him in the wood and brought him home."

Now Mr. Bear was so relieved that he seemed quite overcome, and all he could do was to grunt. He was just like some people you see—when he felt the most, he was able to say the least. But Eric, who had often been in the predicament himself, appreciated this. It really made him feel quite friendly toward Mr. Bear. Tawny Owl, who by this time thought that he was not getting the proper amount of attention himself, now spoke up.

"You know, Bruin, this Elf used to be a little boy, and he really is frightened to death of you." It was very unkind of the owl to give the boy away like this, but it only made Bruin feel all the more kindly towards Eric.

"Well," said he, "I don't know, but that he shows pretty good sense, then. How could he know what kind of a bear I am? Most of the bears, not belonging to the Black Bear family are rather dangerous. In fact I should not care to meet some of my relatives myself."

Eric, somewhat mollified by the bear's manner, now spoke up. "And which are they, please Mr. Bear?"

Now Mr. Bear really was a talkative old fellow, and it was not often he had such an appreciative audience. So he sat back on his haunches and began.

"First of all there is the Grizzly Bear, who is the largest of all bears except the Polar. A few years ago you occasionally would see one in these parts, but now they have become very rare and live mostly in the extreme north of the Rocky Mountains.

"I am glad Grizzly does not come round here any more, for he really is a very vicious old fellow, killing when it is not necessary, and thus giving the rest of us bears a very bad reputation. Grizzly is so large that a blow from his huge fore-paw is enough to kill almost any living creature. Some of them measure as long as nine feet and weigh eight hundred pounds. I knew one of these big old fellows whose paw measured a foot across, and had claws five inches long."

"Oh my!" gasped Eric, looking apprehensively around. "You don't think there is any danger of their coming back here, do you?"

"No," answered Bruin reassuringly. "I am sure they are gone forever. When the hunters and miners found them killing their horses, they shot them in such numbers that the few Grizzlies which remained, departed for regions farther north."

"There are two of my relatives," went on Mr. Bear, "whom I have never seen, and probably never shall—the Sloth Bear and the Polar Bear. The Sloth Bear lives far south in India and Ceylon, and, has very queer habits. He lives chiefly upon ants, which he sucks up from the ground. He is very vicious, and more natives of India are killed by him than by any other animal found there."

"But the most interesting of all our tribe," continued Black Bear, "is the Polar or Ice Bear. He lives up in the arctic regions where they have six months of night. But Polar Bear does not try to avoid these months of darkness and bitter cold by sleeping. No indeed! He is as much at home in the snow and ice as a seal, and can dive, and swim, and climb ice-bergs with the greatest of ease.



"I have heard that Cousin Polar Bear is a great traveller, and sometimes goes hundreds of miles on a piece of floating ice. These bears are larger even than the Grizzly, and their fur is pure white. Some have been known to measure twelve or thirteen feet. Although they are so bulky, they are light as a cork, and their huge, flat feet make first class paddles. These feet are covered with thick fur, so that they may advance on their prey with very little noise. Their food consists of seal and walrus, and a whale they consider a great delicacy."

"I have often seen Polar Bears in the Zoo," said Eric, "but I never saw one as large as you say. Perhaps they were very young bears."

"No," answered Black Bear. "I expect they were full grown. But you see the bears you see at the Zoo have been captured most likely, when they were cubs, and they never grew to the immense size that they would in their native land."



So he sat back on his haunches and began.

Eric had been listening to Mr. Bear's story with breathless interest. He sat silent for a few moments when the story was finished, then said, "There is one thing I should like to know, Mr. Bear. Which species of your tribe is it in the story of 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears?'"

"Oh," said Mr. Bear with a broad grin, "you know that story, too, do you? I think that we Black Bears may claim that honor. Of course I never knew little Goldilocks myself, but my great grandmother knew a bear who could remember the family of bears whom Goldilocks visited in the wood."

Now this was all that Eric needed to reassure him as to Bruin's standing. If he was related to that family of bears, then it was all right. Never more would he have any doubts of Mr. Black Bear or his tribe.

## CHAPTER XX

### WHITETAIL DEER.

**J**UST as certain species of wild flowers seem to seek special kinds of soil, so do our wild animals require certain conditions for their haunts. Reddy Squirrel liked a rather open wood, with lots of oak and chestnut trees. Mr. Woodchuck preferred a sandy hillside, not too wooded, where he might burrow to his heart's content. Squire Fox was particularly fond of a borderland, and open sunny patches. All of these wild creatures, and many more, found the condition which best suited them in this district of Bear Lake.

Now there is one creature, who, though he too loves a borderland sunny and open, requires also the friendly cover of a dense forest. And so we find Whitetail, the Red Deer, perfectly at home in this district. The close proximity of the lake also adds to his pleasure, for Whitetail is a great swimmer. Eric in all his travels with the geese had never met with any of the deer tribe. Probably the reason was that the geese were inclined to stay rather close to the marsh when they were not on the wing, and the deer did not care for that locality at all.

As he left the familiar surroundings of the marsh, the trees grew closer together and before long became quite a forest through which the sunlight penetrated with difficulty. Looking about him, he was attracted to a corner where the ferns grew in great profusion. As he drew near a gentle bleat sounded from among the fernery, and Eric fairly held his breath when he

came upon a wonderfully beautiful little creature nestling there. A young fawn it was, about the size of a large house-cat, with longer legs, and a softly spotted coat. There it lay among the ferns, and held itself so still, that had Eric not the sharp eyesight of an Elf, he certainly never would have seen it. Its glossy coat was a light bay, and the light spots gave it the peculiar effect of sunlight through trees. You see Mother Whitetail was very wise. She knew that if she hid her young in this corner of light and shadows, the mottled coloring of his coat would be a protection in itself.

Now Mrs. Whitetail had gone to the lake for her daily drink, and perhaps a few lily-pads, of which she was very fond.

It would have been much too long a walk for the little fawn, who was only about a month old, and so she had left him hidden in the ferns. The deer tribe do not have a nest, but their home for the first month after the little fawns arrive is the neighborhood of the bit of wood in which they are born. Then when the young are old enough, they start out with the mother and travel in herds.

As soon as Eric came upon the little one he kept very quiet. Soon the young deer rose to its feet and resumed the soft bleating. Undoubtedly he heard the mother deer approaching. And in a moment, from the distance came the answering call of Whitetail. Over the hill she came in great bounds. Crashing through brush and thicket, leaping over logs and stumps, pausing an instant, nose in the air to better scent the little one, and then straight as an arrow she came to the fernery nook.

On the approach of the old one Eric dropped quickly into the long grasses. What he saw was a magnificent

creature, of a dull rusty color with white underneath and a black spot each side of the chin. Of course there were no antlers, as only Mr. Whitetail has the honor of bearing these beautiful appendages.

As soon as the young are a few months old, the family starts out in quest of food, sometimes joining others and traveling in herds. They feed upon all sorts of twigs, moss, and evergreens, and are very fond of nuts, especially acorns. By October they have become very fat, and are ready for the long cold winter. Although the deer seems such a hardy animal, great numbers do not survive the winters of these northlands. Like so many other creatures, it is not the cold that they fear, but the deep, deep snow. Their worst enemy is the



Eric dropped quickly into the long grass.

cougar, who, like Snow Shoe Rabbit, has a shaggy growth on his feet like snowshoes, which enables him to cross the great snow drifts, and thus take the poor deer at a disadvantage.

But in the summer, the deer is carefree and leads a happy contented life, and the creature which Eric had the good fortune to observe this day was one of the most magnificent of her kind. Very gently, then, the Mother Deer lay down in the fern, fondly licking her offspring, and the little Elf-boy slipped quietly away. Not for worlds would he disturb that picture of contentment.



## CHAPTER XXI

### THE MUSKRAT FAMILY.

**T**HERE was great consternation in the house of Danny the Muskrat. Mrs. Muskrat ran up and down the passage of her underground castle, wringing her hands and making soft moaning sounds. First she carried her babies one by one, into the outer passage, then she brought them back again into the den. She was trying to find the very safest spot should Mr. Mink return.

Yes, it was Mr. Mink who was the cause of all this trouble. Very early that morning, before any of the muskrats had left their den, they had heard the mink prowling around in the vicinity. Danny Muskrat, urged by Mrs. Muskrat, had gone out to investigate, but it was not many minutes before he came tumbling in again, quite breathless and with a very scared face.

"It's Mr. Mink!" he announced, "and he is certainly after us this time! Had it not been that the entrance to our house is so deep under the water, he would surely have found us out. But I managed to dive deeper than he, and so lost him for the time. I am afraid though," and he shook his head forebodingly, "we are in for a nasty time."

Now the mink is, as you have surmised, one of the muskrat's worst enemies. There are other creatures, such as weasels, otters, hawks, foxes, and wolves, that sometimes attack the muskrat, but more dreaded than all of these is the mink—and for the reason that he can follow the muskrat right into his very home.

So Danny Muskrat was quite justified in feeling alarmed when he saw Mr. Mink. For four long months Danny and his wife had labored building this wonderful lodge, which they, with their little ones, now inhabited. It was one of the best muskrat houses that one would ever come across in a long time—for Danny was an old experienced muskrat and knew exactly how to go about his building.

First he selected a place in the marshy pond where the water was about two feet deep. Then he dragged to one spot the vegetation and mud from a space fully ten feet around, continuing until he had an island rising ten feet out of the water, looking very much like a small haycock. As the grass and sticks settled down, Danny scooped out the ceiling from within, and by the beginning of August he had a very substantial shelter for himself and family. A shelter, which, when covered with the ice and snow of winter, would be as snug as you please. When he had finished this he dug canals and subterranean passages leading from it.

Snug as this retreat might be, it was still possible for Mr. Mink to enter, could he but find the entrance.

Now Eric, while wandering along the stream saw Danny trembling in his doorway. Swimming rapidly down the stream came one of the muskrat family. It was one of Danny's cousins coming to pay him a visit. He did not see Mr. Mink standing on the bank, but you may be sure the mink saw him, and was only waiting to follow him to Danny's house.

"Oh!" said Eric. "What can I do to outwit Mr. Mink?" Very helpless he felt, when he saw the glittering, angry light in the mink's eyes as he watched the muskrat approach.

Then suddenly it came to him what an old Indian

guide had once told his father. The muskrat family the guide had said, have a very peculiar call—a sort of sucking squeak. Now the Indians when hunting the little animal often, as a means of decoy, imitate this sound by sucking the back of their hand. The sound produced is as near like the muskrat's call as anything could be.

Carrying as large a stone as he could manage, Eric scrambled into an overhanging tree, and putting the back of his hand to his lips he sucked it loudly. Instantly Mr. Mink was all attention! He thought it was Danny for sure. He wheeled about and made for a



She carried her babies one by one into the outer passage.

spot directly beneath the tree. When, thump! on the back of his head came such a blow that he was knocked off into the water—and I want to tell you that he wasted no time in looking about for the muskrat.

Down the stream he swam for dear life! Never once looking behind—and I suspect to this day he is telling his grandchildren of the terrible demon who attacked him that night from overhead.

## CHAPTER XXII

### PADDY BEAVER.

**P**ADDY the Beaver was so busy that he was almost beside himself. There was the dryest part of the summer almost upon them, and the dam was not yet completed. Soon the little pool where he and his family had built their lodge would dry up, and they would be left an easy prey to minks, weasels, or any other enemies who might be prowling about the marsh.

Paddy was usually very forehanded, and by this time under ordinary conditions would have had the dam well under way. It was all the fault of one of the young beavers.

Paddy is a hard master, and every one of the little beavers, as well as Mrs. Beaver, has to work day and night while the dam is under construction. Now, as you know, all children love to play, and it was true of the little beavers as of any one else. The trouble was that little Tommy Beaver in a game of hide and seek, had pushed his way through the soft mud in a newly finished part of the dam and the water had gone out with a rush.

Poor old Paddy, then, was beside himself. Just when he was ready to settle down to a nice snooze and a well earned rest, he must work harder than ever, cutting down trees, stripping off the bark, and carrying up mud, that their dammed-up pool might not rush out and leave them high and dry.

Somehow, the sticks, and bark and mud did not seem to quite answer the purpose. What Paddy wanted

was some nice long tufts of grass to work into his mud and make the wall waterproof. Now Paddy had almost stripped his particular part of the swamp of grass at the first building, and so he was rather worried as to where he was to get any more.

Now there was one spot that Paddy knew about where great quantities of the long dry tufts were to be had, the very thing for his building purposes. But, and this was the sad part of it, it did not belong to Paddy. Paddy knew that there would be trouble if he helped himself to this. Not that Paddy and Danny were enemies, no indeed! Sometimes they were quite friendly—they really were blood relations you see. But just the same Danny did not want anything removed from his property to that of the beavers.

“If I just had a few bunches of that grass,” sighed Paddy to Mrs. Beaver, as he looked longingly in the direction of the marsh, “we would finish the dam in a few hours. Don’t see why Danny wants so much grass anyway. His home is all finished by this time.

Now the more Paddy thought about this, the more it just seemed as if he had to have that grass, and it was not long before he was making his way to the marsh through the little stream connecting it with the swamp. Hastily he cut off the coveted tufts with his sharp little teeth, and returned to the dam. He wedged it into the cracks, put some mud into it, and slapped it hard with his very efficient tail. This tail, by the way, was Beavers most prized tool. It is flattened like a paddle and covered with scales, and he uses it just as a bricklayer does his trowel.

“Slap! Slap!” went the mud into the cracks. Then like a flash Paddy was off again for more grass. Twice he repeated this process, and he was just on his third



trip for more grass, when who should appear but Danny Muskrat!

Danny stood a moment at one of the doors of his house, blinking in the bright sunlight. When his eyes became accustomed to the glare, he made out the figure of Cousin Paddy Beaver not far off working in great haste at something. You may be sure the muskrat wasted no time, but hurried to the spot, and was very angry when he saw what Paddy was doing.

"So, this is where my nice grass has gone," he screeched. "What do you mean by robbing me like this?"

"Well, Danny," said the Beaver, rather shamefacedly, for he had not expected to be caught in the act, "I don't see what you need all this grass for. Your house is finished and I need it desperately, or the water will all run out of my pool."

"I can't help that," answered the Muskrat. "You should build more carefully, and not so fast." (You see the muskrat was always a little envious of the beaver's speed). "I need that grass to hide in. This swamp would be a very dangerous place for me without that protection if a mink or fox were after me."

"But surely you've made enough holes in the banks to hide in," said Paddy, looking around at the wellbored bank behind him.

"That doesn't make any difference," said Danny. "I use that grass for food, too, and anyway it doesn't belong to you." There is no telling where this dispute might have ended, if something at that moment had not happened to put a stop to their argument.

Down the stream in great haste came Mrs. Beaver. "Oh! Paddy," she panted, as she caught sight of the



Beaver and the Muskrat, "do come quick and see what I have found!"

Quickly Paddy turned, and the muskrat accompanied Mrs. Beaver to the lodge. There close up against the broken part of the dam was a huge bunch of dry grass—more than Paddy could use even for a whole dam.

"Wherever did it come from?" asked the delighted Beaver.

"The strangest thing," answered Mrs. Beaver. "Just after you left a queer little creature came along the stream, just above the dam. We kept very quiet,



Danny stood a minute in one of the doors of his house.

as you have always told us to do when danger was near. He looked at the dam for a moment, then going to the field up yonder, carried down armful after armful of this dry grass, and threw it against the dam. What do you make of that?" she asked anxiously.

"Why," said the Beaver, "that must have been the little Elf who came on the backs of the wild geese. We are certainly in luck. There's enough grass here to line the whole inside of the lodge. We don't need your grass now, thank you Danny Muskrat," and he looked triumphantly after the retreating figure of the muskrat.

"Anyway," said Danny to himself, as he swam off to his own property. "Paddy Beaver had no business to take my grass. If he had asked for it, I might have given him some. But I'm not going to have any one get the better of me—much less Cousin Beaver."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### HORN EARS PLAYS A TRICK ON TAWNY OWL.

**O**N the day of Eric's arrival at Bear Lake, you remember he had met his old friend Tawny Owl. Tawny was really a stranger to these parts. If he had had his own way he would have much preferred the familiar haunts of the Little Wood. But after the day Sharp Claws, the hawk, had found him out, there had been no peace for him there. Farther and farther had he been driven north, until he found himself on the shores of the very lake where Eric and the geese had alighted.

Tawny did not find the owls in these parts at all friendly. In fact they were inclined to be quite hostile, and had repulsed all his advances until the little owl was at his wits end to know where to find a lodging place.

Finally, after much searching, he had come upon what appeared to be a very good one in the hollow of an old oak tree. He had watched the hole for several days, but seeing no other creature go into it, had decided that it was discarded, and that he would take up his abode there. He had settled himself comfortably in the nest, and after dining on a fine large field mouse, was preparing for a much needed doze.

Suddenly across his doorway fell a shadow. Not a sound had Tawny heard, although he had slept as usual with both his ears wide open. Tawny's eyesight is so bad in the daylight, that he had to depend on the sharpness of his ears for protection. But he had heard no

sound whatever, when the shadow darkened his doorway. Blinking his round black eyes stupidly, he ambled to the opening.

"What are you doing in there?" demanded a harsh croaking voice.

"Why," answered Tawny, trying to appear very brave, "this is my house. What do you want?"

"Your house indeed!" answered the unpleasant voice. "Hoot! Hoot!" he laughed, "that's funny. Haven't I occupied this hollow for over a year now?" and pushing his way into the aperture he advanced toward Tawny in a very threatening manner. Tawny's eyes, by this time had become more accustomed to the light and he was able to make out the dim outline of his visitor.

The creature who had so rudely invaded his nest was another owl, quite a lot larger than Tawny, very different-looking indeed. A pair of very noticeable ears protruded from each side, and at the top of the head were two feathery tufts like horns which the owl could erect or depress at pleasure. Just at the present time these horns were standing straight up and it gave him a very fierce look indeed.

"My name is Horn Ears," said the intruder, "and you'd better get out of my nest pretty quick!"

"I don't believe it's your nest at all," answered Tawny. "Anyway, you haven't been near it for several days."

"Not my nest!" shrieked Horn Ears, "Not my nest!" Why Piney Squirrel gave me this nest himself last fall when he was through with it."

Now this was not at all true, for Horn Ears is certainly not a friend of the squirrels. He eats them every time he gets a chance. But, of course, Tawny who only eats rats and mice, did not know this, and



The heart of the tree had been hollowed out by coons, squirrels and woodpeckers.

being a nice well-behaved owl, and not wishing to make trouble, he prepared to vacate.

"Well, if that's the case, I suppose it is yours. Do you know of any other vacant hollow where I might live?" he asked of Horn Ears.

"No," said Horn Ears shortly, "I don't." And then looking sidewise at Tawny he added. "On second thought I believe I do. Come with me. There's a tree over by Beaver Dam that I am sure would be just right for you."

Now if Tawny had not been so anxious for a home, he might not have been so unsuspecting. But, as it was, he followed Horn Ears and they started for the swamp near the beaver dam.

The journey was not an easy one as it was broad

daylight, and the two owls flew uncertainly, knocking their wings against trees and bushes. At last they came to a fine old elm, whose days were almost ended. The heart of the tree had been hollowed out by coons, squirrels and woodpeckers.

"Go right in there," said Horn Ears. "That's a very nice place for you. Go way up to the top and you will find a cozy nest."

All unsuspecting, Tawny pushed his way up. "Seems pretty small," he said, as he pushed and squeezed, but he went on as Horn Ears directed. Abruptly the passage came to an end, and instead of getting larger it had become smaller, and was much too close for the owl's comfort. Surely Horn Ears had been mistaken in the trees! He tried to let himself down again, but his feathers brushed the wrong way, stuck into him, and he could not budge an inch. He remembered now what his grandmother, Old Wise Owl had once said to him.—"Never try to come down a tree cavity backwards!"

Now he became alarmed and called to Horn Ears, but not a sound could be heard. How he wished he had never seen the elm tree. And as for Horn Ears—at last he realized that it was all a plot on the part of the wicked bird to get rid of him. The air in the cavity soon became so heavy that he grew drowsy and fell into a doze.

Now it so happened about this time that Eric passed along the shore of the swamp near Beaver Dam. Thinking he had heard the voice of his old friend Tawny Owl, he started toward the wood where he had last seen him. When suddenly from above came a rapping. "Rat-a-tat-tat! Rat-tat-tat!" Looking up into the old elm he saw Downy Woodpecker, pecking industriously at a spot about half way up the tree.





He saw Downy Woodpecker half way up the tree.

"Downy is after his supper," said Eric to himself.

Now the truth of it was that Downy had heard the claws of the imprisoned owl, scratching against the inside of the tree, and had thought it was the boring of a worm. Immediately he began tapping and breaking the bark away that he might have Mr. Worm for his supper. Imagine Woodpecker's surprise when instead of the fat worm, a pair of wide-open staring eyes peered out at him. Now Downy was so frightened that he never stopped to investigate, but flew straight away to the forest.

Now comes the little Elf to the rescue. Climbing up to the spot where he had seen the woodpecker working, he peered into the hole Downy had made. Tawny Owl had been revived by the rush of air and at once called out for help. When he saw that it was his little friend the Elf, he was overjoyed, and between them they managed to break away the rotted wood until there was a space big enough for the owl to break through.

Such a wheezing and puffing, and shaking of feathers there was, when he finally emerged unhurt, but much ruffled!

"Whew!" he exclaimed. "That was a narrow escape. There's no telling when I would have got out if you had not come along."

"However did you get in there, Tawny?" asked Eric. "You must have been crazy to go so far up in a strange tree." Then Tawny told him all about it, how he had been unable to find a nest, and how Horn Ears had tricked him into the tree.

"I'll get even with him," vowed Tawny, "if it takes all my tail feathers."

## CHAPTER XXIV

### HORN EARS DISCOVERS TAWNY'S RETREAT.

**H**ORN EARS had feasted royally. He had dined on the fat partridge he had been stalking for a week. Now he was feeling so satisfied with himself and the world in general, that he thought he would make a little visit to that part of the Wood where Snowy Owl lived and boast of his good luck to his less fortunate cousin. Carefully he wiped all traces of the feast from his beak, and ruffling his soft downy wing feathers, was about to take flight, when the sound of voices on the ground beneath the tree caused him to pause.

Piney Squirrel it was, chattering to one of his neighbors.

"Yes," Piney was saying, "and when I went to the old elm tree to get the nuts I had stored there, what should I find but a strange owl occupying it.

Horn Ears pricked up his ears when he heard this, and after listening a moment, decided that it must be Tawny Owl of whom they were speaking.

"Oh my!" exclaimed the other squirrel. "What did you do?"

"Do? What could I do? You know very well what little chance we squirrels have with any of the Owl Tribe. That old hollow tree was one of Downy Woodpecker's discarded nests, and no one has occupied it for months. I thought my nuts would surely be safe there."

"And are those all the nuts you have, Piney?" asked the other.

"Oh, no indeed!" answered Piney. "You don't think I'd be foolish enough to hide all my nuts in one place, do you?" Then he started reciting to the other his store. "I have three dozen hickory nuts in a tree by the swamp, one peck of butternut meats under a tree root, three dozen——"

"Look out Piney," shrieked the smaller squirrel, "look out for Horn Ears!" Madly the two dashed for safety. But Horn Ears was so well filled with the partridge dinner, that squirrel meat did not particularly tempt him now. He had found out what he wanted to know about Tawny.

Ever since the day he had trapped Tawny into the tree cavity he had wondered about him, and when he heard that a strange owl was occupying the Woodpecker's nest, he knew at once that Tawny must have escaped. It made him very angry to think that he had failed in his attempt to get rid of him.

"I'll get him yet," said Horn Ears to himself. "He won't have any peace in that tree either, if I can help it."

Now of course Horn Ears did not want the nest himself, but neither did he want Tawny to have it, so he set out determined to rout the little owl out of his home.

Meanwhile Tawny in the depths of his new retreat, was quite happy. He had lined the bottom of the nest with down and feathers, and after dining on a fat field mouse, was dozing within the cozy hollow. He knew nothing of course, of the store of nuts which Piney Squirrel had hidden in a notch on the underside of the limb.



Suddenly in their very midst dropped Horn Ears.

Now it happened that Eric was strolling through the wood, after having been with Mr. Coon to the corn-field, and decided to pay a little visit to his friend Tawny Owl to see how he liked his new quarters. As he reached the old elm, who should come along but Piney Squirrel and his companion. Very cautiously they advanced, so as not to awaken the owl.

"There's the tree," said Piney, "and there are my nuts, but how am I to get them when that owl's nest is just above?"

Catching sight of the little Elf boy at the foot of the tree they stopped. Now Piney had heard all about the Elf from Reddy Squirrel's cousin who lived in these parts, so he was not at all frightened. It was not long before he was chattering away to Eric, telling him excitedly about his nuts and how he could not get them because of the owl who had taken up his abode there.

"Ho!" laughed Eric. "You don't need to be afraid of Tawny, he is only a little owl. And anyway he never touches squirrel meat. If you had ever seen him——"

Suddenly in their midst dropped Horn Ears. For a moment he was partially blinded by a strong ray of sunlight, and by the time he had become accustomed to the bright glare Eric and Piney Squirrel had scrambled up into Tawny's nest. Now Horn Ears became very angry. The feathery tufts on his head stood straight up.

"Come out," he shrieked, "if you don't come out I'll come up and eat the three of you!"

Now this was not such an idle threat as you might think, for Horn Ears was easily twice the size of Tawny, and besides his great hooked beak, he had long legs with sharp talons which he could run into the very depths of a nest and draw out his victim. So the three in the nest above trembled but kept very quiet.

Mr. Horn Ears grew madder and madder, and so far forgot himself that he became very noisy, and Red



Tail the Hawk, who was hovering in the vicinity heard him. It did not take Red Tail very long with his sharp eyes to single out the owl at the foot of the tree. Now Red Tail had had no dinner that day, and the thought of a nice fat owl for supper was not at all unwelcome. Nearer and nearer circled the hawk, until he hung directly above Horn Ears. Straight as an arrow then he dropped, and landed square on the back of the foolish Horn Ears! Sinking his talons deep into the owl's soft coat, he bore him up—up—up till he was lost to sight.

Thus ended the days of Horn Ears. And the Green Forest was a much happier place without him.

## CHAPTER XXV

### STRIPES, THE CHIPMUNK.

“HELLO, Stripes!” called Piney Squirrel. “Are you at home?” For a moment there was no answer. Then Stripes’ natural curiosity got the better of him, and he poked his little head out of his hole. But no sooner did his eyes fall on Eric, than he jumped back again.

“My, Stripes, but you are nervous today,” said the squirrel. “This is the Elf who came with the wild geese,” motioning to Eric. “We have come to pay you a visit. We thought perhaps you might show us your den, but you seem more nervous than usual this morning.”

But Mr. Chipmunk was really a very hospitable little soul. “Come right this way,” he said, as he led the way into the narrow passage. Piney Squirrel and Eric had to squeeze to get through the narrow apartment.

“My house is not as neat as it should be,” said Stripes, “but I’ve just got in my last horde of nuts, and I haven’t put them away yet.” Stripes led them under the roots of an old tree, and the place seemed to Eric to grow darker and smell more earthy every step, until he really began to feel a little alarmed. But soon Stripes took them into the dining room, which was quite a spacious apartment, and here Eric became so interested that he forgot his nervousness.

“Come and help yourself to the nuts,” invited Stripes, and digging away the covering of leaves, he

exposed some fine large chestnuts. In another corner were piles of hickory nuts.

"However did you get them all in here, Mr. Stripes?" asked Eric.

"Ho," said Stripes, "that was easy enough. This is the way I carry them." And picking up several acorns in his mouth, he proceeded to pack them in with his hand-like feet, until his cheeks stuck out in a most ridiculous manner. The nuts made his head seem enormous, and he looked so comical that Eric could not help laughing.

"If you carry that many every time, Stripes, no wonder you are so well supplied," said Eric.

"That's nothing," answered Stripes. "I can carry more than that." And he was just going to prove this fact to Eric, when a sound from without made him jump.

"My gracious!" he exclaimed, as he ran excitedly back from the doorway, "there's old Red Tail Hawk outside. Now that he has found out my den, I suppose he will keep close watch over the doorway." When Eric heard this he was really frightened, for he certainly did not relish the idea of spending the night in Stripes' den.

"Let us keep very quiet," said Piney, "and perhaps Red Tail will think there is no one here."

But to keep very quiet was something that Stripes could not do. Nervousness and curiosity being his two chief traits, it just seemed as if he could not be still. Back and forth he rushed, from the store-house to the doorway, until it seemed as if he were actually inviting the hawk's attention.

"Do keep quiet, Stripes," said Piney finally, "or you'll have me as nervous as you are. It's time I was getting home. Isn't there anyway to dig out of here?"



"My gracious, there's Red Hawk outside!"

"Oh," said Stripes, "if you really think you must go, of course, I can let you out of the back door." "Back door!" said Eric and Piney in one breath, "have you really got a back door?"

"To be sure I have," said Stripes. "You don't think I'd run the chance of being penned up in here do you? Come, just this way." And he led the two into a labyrinth of passages, through his sleeping apartment, lined with dry grass, under an old tree root, and in a moment they found themselves outside.

"Whew," said Eric, "that was a narrow escape!"

"Well, I should say!" said Piney as they scuttled away, "but it looks as though Stripes can always get away safely."

## CHAPTER XXVI

### MOURNING DOVE.

**I**T seemed to Eric that he had been at Great Bear Lake a long, long time, when in reality it was only a few weeks. Not that the little Elf-boy was unhappy, no indeed. But his days had been crowded so full of incidents and adventures, that in looking back it seemed that it must have taken months for all these things to happen.

Now Great Bear Lake had not been the geese' destination at all, as you know. They had expected to spend the summer in the rice fields, but old Willy Weasel and his tribe had made it so dangerous that they had been forced to leave the vicinity. And although they had been able to find sufficient food in the Marsh at the end of the Lake, it had not been like the delicious wild rice.

The day after the Great Crane Dance, the loons reappeared on the marsh, and once more the quietness of the place was desecrated by the hideous laughter of these fiendish creatures. That settled it for the geese. They might have stood the coarse food, but to have the quiet of their resting place broken into by these noisy creatures was too much. Yota drew the flock around her and spoke.

"On the morrow we shall depart!"

"But where?" they all clamored. "Where?" this was the question. Where should they find a quiet secluded spot, not so far north and in a good feeding district.

Just then there came from over the hills a soft thrilling note.

"Coo-o-o, ah-coo-o-ooo-o!" Nearer and nearer it came, until almost in their very midst dropped a stranger. A beautiful gray-coated bird, much smaller than the geese, with a black tipped tail and iridescent neck feathers. The geese at once recognized the strange bird as Mourning Dove, whom they had often met on their travels, but never this far north. Now the dove appeared rather frightened in all this wilderness, and recognizing the geese as at least not enemies, had dropped in their midst.

When the geese had recovered from their astonishment, Yota asked,

"What brought you on this unusual journey, Mourning Dove?"

The dove explained to them that he was looking for his mate. He had been storm-driven and forced to find shelter in the marsh.

"But I must go back," he said in his plaintive voice, "I have found no trace of Mrs. Dove here, so I am hoping she may be in the rice fields at Hudson Bay."

Now every one knows how devoted a pair of doves are. Nowhere is there as ardent a lover as Mr. Mourning Dove, and although his notes always sound so sad, there is no happier bird to be found anywhere as long as he is with his mate. The Doves build the most unattractive nest of all our common birds. It is so flimsy and badly constructed that it is a wonder the eggs do not fall through, and when the little ones hatch (there are always only two) they must find this rickety edifice very uncomfortable for their tender little bodies. The dove lovers travel about in pairs. They are quite self-sufficient, and do not mix very much with their kind. In





Almost in their very midst dropped a stranger.

this they are entirely unlike another branch of their family, the Wild Pigeons.

The pigeons always lived in enormous flocks—sometimes thousands—but alas! This sociability was their undoing, for they were so easily netted by man, and in such numbers, that they are now almost extinct. But with the Mourning Dove it is different. It hardly seems worth while capturing a pair of doves, and so they go unmolested, and bring up their young without any interference on the part of man at least.

Although Mrs. Mourning Dove is such an adored wife, she is a very slack housekeeper. Fortunately Mr. Mourning Dove is blind to the short-comings of his wife, and so they are a very happy pair.

The dove who had strayed so far north was no exception. He was anxious to be off and join his mate.

Now Eric who had been silent while the dove talked with the geese, came close to the leader and said,

"Dear Yota, could we not go with Mourning Dove. He spoke of the rice fields you know."

"The very thing!" cried Yota. "Providing the dove wishes our company." Turning to the dove she explained the situation. They were forced to leave the marsh, and they would be glad to accompany Mourning Dove back to the rice fields, if he so desired. This suited Mr. Dove exactly, for he was very lonesome without his mate. But he made the request that they start at once.

"I see no reason why we should not," said Yota. "It looks as if the loons have come to stay, and I for one shall be glad to leave the place."

"There is no reason why we should not."

Now Eric too, was just a little glad to leave the marsh. Although he had been much interested in all the creatures about this wild place, he had never felt quite at home with them. He had not been able to make companions of them as he had of Reddy Squirrel and the hares. And so he was more glad than sorry to hear Yota say they would start on the morrow.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE FINAL FLIGHT.

THE morning dawned. The geese rose high above the marsh, Eric had his seat on the back of Yota the leader, and he realized that this was a great honor. They traveled along easily enough until mid-day, when they came to a large lake. From one side, the opposite shore could not be seen.

"Oh," thought Eric. "I hope we are not crossing that."

But evidently this was their intention. Rising to a great height they traveled straight, making for what must be the opposite shore. The geese had often crossed this lake before, and never had they experienced any difficulty whatever. Always the weather had been fair and everything favorable for a safe trip. Now the injured goosie seemed to hold them back.

Before long, dark clouds piled up in the east. The sun disappeared. The wind rose, and in no time increased to a gale. On they struggled against the teeth of the storm. The wind became thick with sleet, and soon chilled them through. Eric could feel that the leader was becoming fagged. The honk! honk!! of the weary geese could be heard faintly above the shrieking of the gale.

The heart of the little Elf-boy sank within him. Was this then to be the end? Was he to have no chance to prove to all the Wood-Folk in the Little Wood that at last he loved them and was sorry for the way he had mistreated them. Then he began to think of his

mother. He did so want her to know that he was not the cruel boy she had thought him. Oh if only the flock might have strength to reach the opposite shore!

Up in front of them suddenly rose a great wall. The jagged rocks suddenly projected in great peaks. The wind beat and lashed the spray against them.

The geese were on their last wind. Panting, the flock, all but the leader, reached the granite ledge and scrambled upon it. Every one, but Yota, upon whose back was Eric. Then in horror the boy realized that never would the goosie be able to climb onto the rock with his own added weight! Again and again the old goose tried—but it was no use.

Giving one shuddering sigh, and closing his eyes tight, Eric let go his grip of the goosie's neck and slipped down—down—down!

\* \* \* \*

Bright sunlight pierced the branches of every tree in the Little Wood, and touched all the glistening things like jewels. The flowers lifted their wet, fragrant heads, and all the birds twittered and broke into bits of song. Every living thing was grateful for the refreshing shower.

"Here he is!" called a relieved voice. "Why Eric, son! We were so frightened."

At the foot of the old elm sat a very pathetic figure indeed. A little boy, evidently drenched by the shower, sat up and confusedly looked about him. Drops of water ran from his hair, and from the end of his nose, and splashed unheeded to his lap. He continued to stare speechless, as the lady hurried to him.

"Eric! You must have fallen asleep and a thunder storm came up!"

Then the little figure came to life. Jumping to his feet he stared about him. "Mother," he said, "Mother—where are the geese?"

"Why, listen to the child," cried Mrs. Oldson as she gathered the wet little figure to her. "You have been asleep dear, and have dreamed." But Eric only shook his head.

Over in the tree sat Reddy Squirrel and not a nut did he have.

"Oh!" said Eric eagerly, "May I get some nuts for Reddy Squirrel?"

"Why, yes, dear," answered his mother, looking curiously at him. What change was this? Eric had never cared for animals at all. In fact, she had often feared that he was not kind to them.

Again the dazed look came into Eric's eyes. "Mother," he said, "do you suppose the old goose is safe? Look! here is a feather from her wing."

Sure enough tightly grasped in his wet little hand was a white goose-feather!

"Of course it was only a dream, dear. Come, we will fetch some nuts for the squirrel."

Eric obediently followed his mother. But he shook his head wisely. He knew better. It could not have been a dream! Else how had he come by the goose-feather?

THE END.



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